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PLAYS OF THE YEAR

1948-49

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PLAYS OF THE YEAR

CHOSEN BY
J. C. TREWIN

COCKPIT

Bridget Boland

FAMILY PORTRAIT

Lenore Coffee and W. Joyce Cowen

*THE HAPPIEST DAYS
OF YOUR LIFE*

John Dighton

THE MISER

Molière, adapted by Miles Malleeson

THE PARAGON

Roland and Michael Pertwee

DON'T LISTEN, LADIES!

*Sacha Guitry, adapted by
Stephen Powys and Guy Bolton*

1948-49

PAUL ELEK · LONDON

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PLAYS OF THE YEAR 1949
is to be published in April 1950 uniform with the present volume. The six plays will include

ANN VERONICA

by Ronald Gow, from the novel by H. G. Wells

BLACK CHIFFON

by Lesley Storm

DARK OF THE MOON

by Howard Richards and William Berney

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FOR WENDY
who has seen them all

INTRODUCTION

Here are six plays produced in Britain during the twelve months that ended on January 31, 1949. I do not claim that they are the six best plays of this period: I submit merely that all are good of their kind, and that they share qualities for which a true theatregoer looks. He/she likes to be told a persuasive story; he/she likes vigour, plain-dealing, brisk movement, sharp character-drawing. The chosen six own these qualities and others as well. Thus COCKPIT has value as a document: it can take the mind beyond the theatre to the troubled heart of post-war Europe. THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE sways with the straws-in-the-hair insobriety of the best farce. FAMILY PORTRAIT is a New Testament piece that manages to be both reticent and touching. THE PARAGON is "well-made" in the tradition of the late Victorian-Edwardian master-builders. DON'T LISTEN, LADIES! puffs a Parisian bubble. THE MISER shows how an expert man of the theatre can keep the very spirit of Molière without binding himself in the fetters of literal translation.

The texts will speak for themselves. I propose to give here some idea of the impact the six plays had on me when they were first produced. Take Bridget Boland's COCKPIT on its February night in 1948. The theatre was apparently the Playhouse in London. But, before we had quite settled down, it was also a German provincial theatre in May, 1945, and a covey of Displaced Persons was hurtling by us in the stalls. Presently there seemed to be a case of bubonic plague in a box. All of this was alarming. Exits were guarded, a British officer harangued the audience, and a minute later—for we were now Displaced Persons to a man—I had no idea whether my next move would be eastward or westward, with my pitiful bundle and the loaf I had managed to grab.

COCKPIT, you will have gathered, is no ordinary play. Bridget Boland had the idea of turning her theatre for an hour or so to disrupted Europe in microcosm. Here, in this document-drama, are members of the warring races (and the warring sub-divisions of those races), the angry, the desperate, the weary, and the stateless, all brought together in one building. Whatever the British officer and his sergeant—working, earnestly, by rule-of-thumb—can do, racial angers and jealousies will mount in a frantic hubbub. As Gilbert very nearly said:

*Few of these elements seem to be fusible,
But melt them all down in a pipkin or crucible,
Set them to simmer and take off the scum,
And the hottest H.E. is the residuum.*

This piece is certainly high explosive. It puts the theatre in a blaze. First, we are shown the flames of riot leaping while the Britons try urgently to stem them: then, as by miracle, the foes are transiently united when there is threat of bubonic plague—dire mosaicist—behind the curtains of a box: then again, at the last, when we find that the plague is a rumour

merely—the man has died of tetanus—the racial fires are re-kindled. This time it seems that the British soldiers are in grave peril. The curtain falls. We can speculate on the end for ourselves.

Artistically, an adventurous experiment succeeded. Could this cockpit hold the warring souls of Europe? Indeed it could. Alas, London playgoers refused to do their duty. Within two months the production had become a memory; but it is a memory that survives, and I am not likely to forget how the London Mask Theatre presented the play, and how Michael MacOwan and Michael Warre managed to make impressive use of both stage and auditorium. The all-in method can be dangerous: Miss Boland and her producers mastered it without shattering illusion, and they were aided by a cast in sound voice and training. (For some the evening held a good deal of obstacle-racing about the theatre.) Looking back now, after fifteen months, I salute Joseph O'Connor, as the officer with a distrust in passionately-held beliefs, and Arthur Hambling as his North Country sergeant; Geoffrey Dunn, as a Polish intellectual; Diana Graves, a flash from the French Resistance; Dudley Jones, as a monomaniac stage manager; and Phyllis Mander who sang—to our surprise—an aria from Traviata when the theatre for a few minutes became an opera house: a cunning stage coup.

I believe that both the stage manager and the singer were deleted when André van Gyseghem produced COCKPIT for the miners in the halls of South Wales and the North-East. But the play, in its revised form, held every audience. It will become, undeniably, a valued period piece, and I shall hope one day to see and to hear again that pentecostal crew of D.Ps, whose racial ructions—"the men of half Creation damning half Creation's eyes"—very properly shake the theatre, cellar to roof. No lounge-hall, French-window stuff here.

II

• *It is far from those anxious hours to THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE. This is a tale told in school, and John Dighton knows how to tell it. The headmaster of his Hilary Hall (better Hilarious Hall) might have been the late Will Hay; certainly every boy must go on to the St. Olde's of a Charley's Aunt Oxford. When you mix with Hilary Hall the forces of a girls' school (St. Swithin's), with Margaret Rutharford,* like some trumpeting dragonfly, as its principal, you can imagine the sort of thing that happened on a night in March, 1948—and went on happening—upon the stage of the Apollo. A first-night audience spent the hours in a high delirium, asking itself, as each impossible situation was resolved, how in the world this could be capped by another. Invariably it was. To write this type of farce the author must be in a high delirium himself. Fortunately, Mr. Dighton's temperature, like that of his people, seems never to have dropped.*

Is it possible to be explicit? Let me say simply that the Ministry of Evacuation—not for the first time—has blundered. St. Swithin's is on a blue card. Therefore it must be a boys' school. Therefore it can be, and is, billeted on Hilary Hall. This is disaster; St. Swithin's is, of course, a remarkable academy for girls, staffed (on the first night) by Miss Rutherford in deadliest swoop; by Viola Lyel, as the heartiest of games and needlework mistresses; and by Patricia Hastings for the sake of the love interest. There is also one pupil: no doubt others exist, but we are allowed, as a sample, to see only a wee Scots lassie called Cahoun (not Colquhoun) and played by Molly Weir with the persistence of an active wasp about the raspberry jam. The author is nothing if not symmetrically-minded, so Hilary Hall responds with a

** Succeeded later by Joyce Barbour.*

bumbling headmaster (George Howe) who can be merely a tangle of wool faced by the snapping scissors of Miss Rutherford; a vinegary junior master—decanted with relish by Colin Gordon—whose sarcasm in class is probably notorious; and another usher (Myles Eason) who is Hilary Hall's reply to the charmer of St. Swithin's. Again there is one pupil: here Mr. Dighton sets Sassenach against Scot, and Hopcroft Minor (Peter Davies) proves that he can speak well for the South.

Once Hilary Hall and St. Swithin's are in forced summer-term partnership, Mr. Dighton produces two sets of parents, one for each school. Each of the couples, for sufficiently farcical reasons, must be kept from the truth; thus we have some of the most frenzied bubble-and-squeak hide-and-scramble staged for years; the author shows a devilish resource in heaping his absurdities and securing the right idiotic retort to some equally preposterous crack. There is no need to talk about the Theory of Farce; Ben Travers might have burnished the play more wittily, but it reads well—in farce a most remarkable thing. Mr. Dighton set himself to be loud and funny, and on these terms none could have managed better. It will be surprising if there is another school romp for a very long time; this one has plastered all of the farcical bricks with all of the farcical mortar-boards.

III

Another long leap: Dighton to Molière. It may seem strange at first to have a version of L'AVARE (1668) in a volume of contemporary plays; but THE MISER in this form is as much Miles Malleeson's comedy as it is Molière's. Malleeson is one of the finest character actors in our theatre: in such parts as Silence, golden-drunk and vocal in that summer night on Cotswold, as a Peter Quince one has met on many

Parish Councils, and as Old Ekdal in the queer attic-forest of Ibsen's The Wild Duck, he is unforgettable. He is also an expert dramatist. In THE MISER he offers a very free version of L'AVARE that, in its suppleness and vivacity, makes others seem buckram-stiff. Let me contrast here two passages in Malleeson's play with two in a translation made by Baker and Miller in 1739 and deemed by academic criticism to hold "more of the spirit of the original than would be found in a more modern version." Take first the scene between Mariane and Frosine in Act Two:

MALLESON

MARIANE: Oh, Frosine. I'm so miserable. How I dread this meeting!

FROSINE: Oh, come now, my dear, it's not as bad as that.

MARIANE: I know, now, what it must have been like to be led to the rack. The first sight of it! And everybody around eager to see one stretched in agony.

FROSINE: Well, of course, if you put it like that, old Harpagon isn't exactly the death I should choose. But look me in the eyes, girl; this sudden distress isn't so much because of the old man, but of the young one you've just told me about.

MARIANE: I can't deny it. I can't. Oh, Frosine if you were bringing me to *his* house. If it were *he*, who was to be my husband!

FROSINE: And you've no idea who he is?

MARIANE: No idea.

FROSINE: How often has he been to see you?

MARIANE: Not often enough.

FROSINE: Did he bring presents? Expensive ones?

MARIANE: No.

FROSINE: None?

MARIANE: None.

FROSINE: Then he's probably as poor as a Church Mouse. If you married him, he'd give you a baby; and that's about all you'd get out of *him*! But this old one—he'll die.

MARIANE: But I don't want him to die.

FROSINE: He's got to. It's in the contract.

MARIANE: In the contract?

FROSINE: Not in so many words, in black and white. But between the lines. Written, my dear, by the finger of Time in invisible ink! and he'll leave you his fortune, and that *is* in the contract, and—here he comes!

MARIANE: God help me!

(Enter Harpagon)

BAKER AND MILLER

MARIANA: Ah! Frosina, what a strange way am I in! If I must speak what I feel, how terribly am I apprehensive of this interview!

FROSINA: But why so! What is it disquiets you?

MARIANA: Alas! Do you ask it? And can't you imagine with yourself the alarms of a person just entering upon view of the rack on which she is to be fixed?

FROSINA: I see plainly that to die agreeably, Harpagon is not the rack you would willingly embrace; and I know by your countenance, that the young spark you were speaking to me of, comes afresh into your head.

MARIANA: Yes, Frosina, 'tis what I don't pretend to deny; the respectful visits he paid at our house, have made, I confess, some impression upon my mind.

FROSINA: But have you learnt who he is?

MARIANA: No, I don't know who he is; but I know he is formed with an air to inspire love; that if matters could be referred to my choice, I should take him before another; and that he contributes not a little to raise in me a horrible dread of the husband you would impose upon me.

FROSINA: Lack-a-day, these young sparks are all agreeable enough, and play their part very well; but most of 'em are poor as rats, and it would suit you much better to take an old man, who'll make you a good settlement. I grant you, that the senses will not find their account quite so well on the side I speak of, and that there are certain disgusts must be endured with such a husband; but this is not to last long. And, believe me, his death will soon put you in a condition for taking one more amiable, who will make amends for all.

MARIANA: Bless me, Frosina, 'tis a strange affair when, to be happy, we must wish, or wait for somebody's death; and death will not second all the projects we're pleased to set on foot.

FROSINA: You joke sure! You're not to marry him but on condition of leaving you very soon a widow; this ought to be on one of the articles of the marriage contract. 'Twould be downright impertinent not to die in three months. But here he comes in his proper person.

MARIANA: Ah! Frosina! what a figure is there!

(Enter Harpagon.)

'And here now is the passage immediately after the entrance of Anselm towards the end of the play:

MALLESON

HARPAGON: There's the Seigneur! Seigneur Anselm! Oh, Seigneur Anselm!

ANSELM: My dear Harpagon! What is it? What can be the matter? You look distraught! Beside yourself!

HARPAGON: So would you be! See that fellow there! . . . that one! . . . with Crime written all over him—he's stolen my money—

VALERE: *What's that?*

HARPAGON: And planned to steal my daughter—and that reminds me of course! What am I thinking about! That concerns you—doesn't it?—you've come to get married! Yes, of course! He was planning to steal your wife! Well—there he stands, self-confessed. Take your revenge.

ANSELM: My good Harpagon, I assure you I have no intention of marrying any woman against her will; and, in particular, I would not dream of holding your daughter to any arrangement, if her heart is elsewhere. But, for yourself, my dear Harpagon, why, to be sure I'll protect your interests as if they were my own.

HARPAGON: Well said, well said. (*To Valere, indicating Anselm*) The Chief Magistrate of the Town! (*To Anselm*) You deal with him! Take over his case—and make it as black against him as you can!

VALERE: I must protest! Why should my affection, my love, for your daughter be called a crime?

HARPAGON: Why! Why! *You*—a rascally servant—

VALERE: True, in your eyes, I am a servant; nor can I blame you for that. It was part of my deception—

HARPAGON: Hark at him!

VALERE: But I'd have you know, Monsieur Harpagon—I'd have you know that in myself I am of Gentle, even Noble birth.

HARPAGON: Rubbish! Stuff-and-nonsense! Fiddlesticks! D'you expect me to believe *that*? The world's crowded with such Imposters—taking advantage of being Nobodies to pretend they're Somebody.

VALERE: You wrong me, Monsieur; indeed you do. Never would I make any claim to which I hadn't *every* right. I'll go further; there's no living soul throughout the whole great city of Naples, who couldn't bear witness to the truth of what I'm about to tell you.

ANSELM: Naples! Take care, young man! I know Naples—as if it were my own house. I can most easily test the truth of anything you may say.

ANSELM: What's the matter here, Signor Harpagon? You are very much ruffled, I see.

HARPAGON: Ah! Signor Anselm; I am one of the most unfortunate men; and here's the Lord knows what vexation and disorder in respect to the contract you come to sign. I'm assassinated in my fortune, assassinated in my honour; and there's traitor, a villain, who has violated all the most sacred ties; who has slid himself into my family under the title of a menial servant, to rob me of my money, and to seduce my daughter.

VALERE: Who minds your money, that you make such a senseless pother about?

HARPAGON: Yes, they've made each other a promise of marriage. This affront concerns you, Signor Anselm; and 'tis you who ought to take party against him, and prosecute him to the utmost at your own expense, to revenge yourself on his insolence.

ANSELM: It is not my design to force myself upon anybody, or to make any pretences to a heart which has already bestowed itself. But as to your interests, I'm ready to espouse 'em as if they were my own.

HARPAGON: There's a gentleman that's a very honest Commissary, who tells me he'll omit nothing which concerns the duty of his office. (*To the Commissary, pointing to Valere*) Charge him, sir, as you should do, and make things very criminal.

VALERE: I don't see what crime you can make of the passion I have for your daughter; and the punishment to which you think I may be condemned on account of our engagement, when 'tis known who I am—

HARPAGON: I value all these stories not a straw; and the world nowadays is full of nothing but your rascally quality, your impostors, who make advantage of their obscurity, who trick 'em selves insolently out, with the first illustrious name that comes into their head.

VALERE: Know that I have a heart too honest, to take upon me anything which does not belong to me; and that all Naples can bear witness of my birth.

ANSELM: Soft and fair, take care what you are going to say. You run more risk here than you're aware of. You speak before a person to whom all Naples is known, and who can easily see through your story.

Malleeson's flowing version, beautifully tuned and timed in Tyrone Guthrie's production, toured the mining-village halls of the North-East in the late

winter and early spring of 1949 and delighted its eager critical audiences. I saw it at its première, before it reached the Black Belt of Durham. The place was the Spa Theatre at Whitby on the Yorkshire coast one night in mid-January. My wife and myself, with Charles Landstone (of the Arts Council) and A. V. Cookman (of The Times), drove from Darlington in the ebb of the afternoon and the thickening twilight of a late winter day. It had been a magnificent afternoon, frosty and tingling. As we crossed the Cleveland Hills, past the weird, broken peak of Rosberry Topping, the sun was low and the great swathe of moorland above Whitby was burnished umber in the last light. Then the dark closed in and we were driving down to the salt-charged heart of Whitby. Above us the cliff-top Abbey, raising its ruined arch over the North Sea, was sharp against a splinter of grey sky. It vanished—and we were suddenly at the door of our hotel. A play had to be good to stand in memory against that drive. But at the Spa an hour later, the North Sea lapping the walls, L'AVARE easily conquered. The performance held ear and eye; Malleeson and Tyrone Guthrie shared the evening's honour with their Harpagon (Alexander Archdale), light-weight but feverishly alert, and—for me—with the small-part Seigneur Anselm of Cecil Winter, who enjoyed himself hugely in the last audacious untangling. Soon afterwards THE MISER, with another company, was broadcast, Malleeson himself as Harpagon. I did not hear this.* Oddly, for me the play must be set forever on that small Spa Theatre stage with a January night stealing around, and the incidental music of the waves.

* Since I wrote this preface it has been announced that the Old Vic Company will appear in *The Miser* at the New Theatre early in 1950. Miles Malleeson will play Harpagon, and Tyrone Guthrie is again the producer.

IV

France again next, in the Powys-Bolton adaptation of a Guitry comedy. The matter here is very different. I can best describe DON'T LISTEN, LADIES! in a quotation from my notice in The Sketch after the St. James's première in September, 1948. •

When [I wrote] the curtain rises, Francis Lister, as M. Daniel Bachelet, owner of a Paris antique shop, suddenly slides forward to address us—confidentially, as man to men. If any of the other sex are in earshot, they must turn aside, for what Bachelet says is not for them; he is attacking the whole tribe of women, and he does it with gusto and sustained invention. The monologue seems in length to outrun any of Hamlet's—for whom Bachelet has a practitioner's sympathy—but, on the whole, the plays have little else in common. This is a French farcical comedy of the old school, something we have not seen in the West End—or, at least, with this polish and poise—for a very long time. Twenty years ago similar froth would have been whipped by Seymour Hicks. Now Francis Lister stands as a Daniel in a den of lionesses.

Like the cuckoo-comedies of the Restoration, the piece keeps insistently upon one note. Let Bachelet claim that he detests women. No matter. We know that he will be surrounded by them within a minute or so—and indeed he is: by Madeleine, who is his second wife, and who has a whole battery of enchantments (she has just spent the night with a young man in the Big Wheel, but what of that?); by Julie Bille-en-Bois, who was an early flame—Moulin Rouge variety—and who is now only a glowing ember; and by Valentine, the first wife, who for reasons of her own has taken to flat-heeled shoes and flatter poetry. Between them—but more especially between the young woman, Madeleine and Valentine—they manage to turn the back room of an antique shop into a busy

battle-ground. How Bachelet lives through it all it is hard to imagine; but he does, and, moreover, finds frequently a good line to cheer his ordeal.

• *We expect this salting wit, for the play is adapted from the French of Sacha Guitry. No topic can suit him better. Women and All About Them is a theme that he can still embroider with a continuous vivacity. The plot hardly matters for a moment. Guitry tosses up his gauze and we are pleasantly enmeshed; but no one will really care, I think, whether Daniel ends with Madeleine or Valentine, or whether he stands on his head outside the shop door. What does matter is the flickering feather-whisk of the dialogue, the knowledge that Paree—in spite of M. Sartre and after the lapse of two wars—is still Gay in precisely the same fashion. The author may insist too much, and the comedy goes on too long. We could be grateful now and then for some relief from the continuous sparring of the sexes. Still, it is long since we have had a frivol of this kind; old hands will shed a few glad tears and search in the programme for the name of Hicks, and younger playgoers will find in it, curiously enough, something rich and strange. The acting, in William Armstrong's brisk production, suits the piece. Francis Lister can blow about this puff-ball comedy without obvious effort; the part is safe from the moment we listen to the pointing and timing of his first soliloquy; in appearance he comes straight from that fashionable antique shop. The amorist, as he deserves to be, is lucky in his wives. Constance Cummings (First Minx) has rarely looked more enchanting or used a more winning bubble-gaiety: watch her as she does a Camille act, with suitably hacking cough, in the last few minutes. Betty Marsden's variation on the old clothes-and-the-woman device has a quick freshness, and there is a jewel of a performance by Ada Reeve (ex-Meulin Rouge) who will live now, we presume, on the proceeds of her youthful portrait by Toulouse-*

Lautrec. Denholm Elliott contrives to be queerly moving as the young shop assistant with a passion for spiders and moths and—with no association of ideas—for his employer's wife (the great Big Wheel stopped turning); he gets delicately around a passage of Guitry's gummier sentiment. John Morley, I believe, spoke of the French tongue as the speech of the "clear, the cheerful, or the august" among men. Here, and blithely, the accent is on good cheer. •

V

DON'T LISTEN, LADIES! is a well-made play. So, too, in more serious mood is THE PARAGON. Well-made drama is out of fashion. Dramatists shuffle uncomfortably when they are reminded of Pinero and Jones. They are afraid of the plot that is smoothly contrived, the machinery that works. Jones and Pinero would have raised a surprised eyebrow at such an episodic-cinematic piece—excellent in its manner—as the Ronald Gow version of Wells's Ann Veronica. They would have been much happier with the father-and-son collaboration of THE PARAGON.

A play by a father and son is an uncommon event in London. We have had a mother-and-son play—Hugh Burden, who acted in THE PARAGON, wrote a moving piece, entitled *Myself A Stranger*, with his mother, Caro Burden—but recent parallels to the union of Roland and Michael Pertwee are hard to find. Here their work is a most pleasant combination of the old head and the young. One suspects that Roland Pertwee looked after the construction while Michael Pertwee injected many lines that freshen the dialogue of what is, from the first, a strong play without truckling. Possibly there was an entirely different division of labour; but it is difficult not to feel that the

hand of an experienced dramatist is manipulating the characters and setting them so precisely into place. A good thing about the Pertwees' play is that its people, though frankly manipulated, are in no sense theatre-puppets without the tingle of life. They do live: just how fully we realised at the première in May, 1948, when, as Walter Fitzgerald was saved from throwing himself over the balcony in the last act, the house shivered involuntarily into applause.

Praise indeed; the shades of Pinero and Jones, standing benevolently in the wings, must have echoed it. For this is a well-made piece of the type the master-builders would have approved. Let fledgling dramatists gibe; there is no doubt that the well-made drama at its best can give far more pleasure than any number of limp-and-slither plays, boneless wonders that flop upon the stage like wet dough. Admittedly, slow starting is a trouble. There is much to be planted, and it may be some time before we get the crop. The Pertwees pass over this well; once we have sorted out the relationships in a first leisurely quarter of an hour, the play lunges finely through its series of planned situations.

Sir Robert Rawley is a hero-worshipper of his son Simon who died in Normandy. He is building a local memorial to the boy and, in so doing, offending all in the neighbourhood who have lost sons, and who cannot afford such a commemoration as this. But nothing will stop Sir Robert. Nothing, that is, except the son's return. And the son does return. The boy who had "died" in a Normandy trench appears suddenly in Rawley's house in the Vale of Avalon, a deserter who has been living on his wits since his "death" was announced. It is not breaking faith to say this. None with any sense of drama can fail to guess that the Unknown Man—a part acted by Hugh Burden with the proper mixture of bravado and bitterness—will be the Paragon of the title. For a time all seek to keep the

truth from Sir Robert. There is, too, another complication. Simon's wife has married in secret the heir of the local peer. Altogether, we have a pretty dilemma after dinner on that summer night in that first-floor study above the green stretches of the Vale. Sir Robert has to learn the truth—at the Fortune Walter Fitzgerald mapped his progress towards it with an extremely telling blend of bluntness and sensibility—and we come to a climax in which the blind man is faced by the son who had been his life and who is now exposed as deserter, coward, blackmailer, and, it appears, murderer. I still remember the exciting stage fight at the Fortune: a slashing rough-and-tumble in a moonlit room. There was a good cast: Arthur Wontner, Rachel Kempson, Elizabeth Kentish, and that strong, steady actor, Anthony Marlowe, as Glandon's heir. Strength, steadiness: there performance matched plot.

VI

So, at last, to FAMILY PORTRAIT. Here, also, I think of the première. That day, in the spring of 1948, we returned from the North-East after a mining-village production of *Caste*. The long train journey across the East Midlands had been a little tiresome. I was not feeling like a night at the theatre, and FAMILY PORTRAIT, an American tale of the family of Christ, seemed to me to lag in spite of a magnificent performance by Fay Compton as Mary the Mother. The evening was not helped by the vacuous guffawing of one of my neighbours: a silly-sophisticated young man-about-town. I left the theatre vaguely disappointed. A few days later I knew I was wrong. For the play remained with me; it grew in the mind. I found myself remembering passages that on the night had flicked by, apparently unnoticed. Darkneses

brightened in the memory. I was haunted by the quietness and simplicity of Fay Compton in that touching close:

Mary: If it's a boy, will you name him after your brother—after Jesus, I mean.

Judah: Why—why, yes, Mother—I'll talk to Deborah about it.

Mary: It's a nice name . . . I'd like him not to be forgotten.

I vowed to go back to the Strand Theatre to see the play for a second time. Before I could do this, FAMILY PORTRAIT had been withdrawn. It is still clear in recollection; not a major play but sincere, dignified and moving, and distinguished by its picture of Mary as the fond Mother who seeks so lovingly to understand the strange genius of the Son. New Testament plays are bound to belong to what I have called the Off-stagey Drama in which we have to make do with reported narratives of great, unseen events. Even so, FAMILY PORTRAIT is very high in its school. It is never catchpenny; it is never exhibitionist. I am glad to have in my collection the original programme which bears the words from the third verse of the sixth chapter of St. Mark: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph, and of Juda and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him."* Fay Compton governed the evening, both in the simple home at Nazareth and in the scenes in the Capernaum wine-shop, and at Jerusalem on the night of the Last

* The authors add this note: "The play, Family Portrait, is based upon the literal interpretation of these English words from the Authorised Version of the Bible. It should be stated, however, that the words 'brothers' and 'sisters' are interpreted by many as meaning 'cousins', by others as meaning 'step-brothers' and 'step-sisters', i.e., children of Joseph before his betrothal to Mary. The authors, in adopting the first interpretation, in no way wish to offend the susceptibilities of those who take a contrary view."

Supper; but David Markham, Clare Harris, and Ernest Clark all gave performances that linger now with the play.

So much, then, by way of preface. The rest lies with the reader.

J. C. Trewin.

Hampstead,
June, 1949.

I am grateful to the Editor and Proprietors of The Sketch for permission to quote from my articles in that journal.

C O C K P I T

A play in two acts

by

BRIDGET BOLAND

The cast of the London Mask Theatre production
at the Playhouse Theatre on February 19, 1948,
was as follows :

CLAUDIA	-	-	-	<i>Phyllis Mander</i>
REBECCA	-	-	-	- <i>Lilly Molnar</i>
ANNA	-	-	-	<i>Tatiana Lieven</i>
PETER	-	-	-	<i>Peter Drury</i>
JAROSLAV	-	-	-	- <i>Foss Clewes</i>
SERGEANT BARNES	-	-	-	<i>Arthur Hambling</i>
CAPTAIN RIDLEY	-	-	-	<i>Joseph O'Connor</i>
BAUER	-	-	-	<i>Dudley Jones</i>
JIRI	-	-	-	<i>Paul Hardtmuth</i>
THE PROFESSOR	-	-	-	<i>Geoffrey Dunn</i>
DUVAL	-	-	-	<i>Marcel Poncin</i>
MILOSH	-	-	-	<i>Julian Randall</i>
DRAJA	-	-	-	- <i>Harry Locke</i>
MARIE	-	-	-	<i>Diana Graves</i>
A WOMAN	-	-	-	- <i>Eileen Way</i>
CAPTAIN SAUNDERS	-	-	-	<i>John Brooking</i>

Produced by Michael MacOwan.

The play ran for 58 performances.

*All enquiries regarding performance of this play must
be sent to Christopher Mann Ltd., 120 Park Lane,
London, W.1.*

Characters

CLAUDIA *A Displaced Person*

REBECCA *A Polish Jewess*

ANNA *A Pole, wife to Jaroslav*

PETER *A Russian farm worker*

JAROSLAV *A Polish farm worker*

SERGEANT BARNES *A British N.C.O.*

CAPTAIN RIDLEY *A British Officer*

BAUER *A German Stage Manager*

JIRI *A Czech*

THE PROFESSOR *A Pole*

DUVAL *A French farmer*

MILOSH *A Yugoslav partisan*

DRAJA *A Yugoslav Ghetnik*

MARIE *A young French Communist*

A WOMAN *A Russian*

CAPTAIN SAUNDERS *A British Medical Officer*

The action of the play takes place in a provincial theatre in Germany, in May, 1945.

ACT ONE

The theatre is turned for the purpose of the production into the Hoftheater of Deutscheshof, a provincial town in Germany, a few days after its occupation by British troops. The theatre has been made the assembly centre for Displaced Persons from the vicinity, or on their way through the town and it is hung with notices in every European language. The notices are handwritten and the organisation obviously makeshift. The D.Ps. are instructed where they may go, where leave transport and luggage, and how they must behave in the theatre. Spitting is forbidden. People are implored to use the conveniences provided. One set of notices tells its own story: "NO FIGHTING," and written on the same card below it, "OR CARRYING FIREARMS," and in despair, tacked underneath, "OR KNIVES MORE THAN THREE INCHES LONG." It is pointed out that the portable fittings of the theatre belong to the Military Government and must not be removed. Persons with infectious diseases and expectant mothers are not admitted.

The curtain is painted in a Germanic style, and has been decorated in chalk by the D.Ps. with offensive slogans and as much vulgarity as is permissible.

As the house lights go down, the curtain bulges; the bottom of it is lifted a little and the legs of an immense property sofa, upholstered in plush appear. A man, dirty, and in ragged dusty clothes, crawls out and battles with the curtain, trying to find an opening. He has an idea, and goes off at the side. The curtain goes up, disclosing another man standing by the sofa, which is piled with cushions and hangings. The first man jumps down, and they lower the sofa between them, eventually taking it out through the nearest exit from the stalls.

The stage is in a stage of nature, bare except for a few things left standing about after the last production, which has evidently been in a heavy, flamboyant style. In contrast are the few D.Ps., who, with their little mounds of belongings, have camped out on the stage. Sitting on the edge of a rostrum, down on one side, is Claudia, a woman of no recognisable age, quietly dressed in clothes that were once good but are now dusty and battered. She has no luggage except a small snakeskin dressing-case, which she holds on her knees throughout. She leans back and watches everything, so long as it does not require her to turn her head far, with the mild lack of interest with which she might watch sheep grazing.

Above her, on the same side are Anna and Jaroslav, Polish peasants, she thirty-five or so, and he a few years older. They are dressed in assorted rags and are lying with their heads on two small bundles. They raise their heads to see what is the matter as the curtain goes up, but lie back again.

Up centre lies Peter, an immense slow-looking Russian farm worker. He is deeply asleep on his stomach, and has no baggage at all.

Further down, on the opposite side from the others, is Rebecca, a Polish Jewess, middle-aged, as raggedly dressed as the others but for one highly-coloured piece of finery. She has a pile of bundles and suitcases, tied with straps and bits of rope, and among the pile is a baby wrapped in a black shawl. Her arm is flung over it as she lies.

When the second of the sofa-carriers has jumped down off the stage, Anna raises her head again and looks across at Rebecca. The latter is apparently asleep. Anna moves cautiously across the stage and reaches for the handle of a saucepan that is protruding from underneath the mound of Rebecca's belongings. Rebecca grabs her wrist, and Anna screams.

REBECCA: Du gemtnes shick drek—du ganefti.

ANNA: Pushtsh mnye—pushtsh mnye—stretna malpo.

REBECCA: Te pshakree Polska sweeno—kuruati matre!

PETER: Zamolcheetie! Oossneetie!

[Jaroslav has woken and strides over just as Anna contrives to wrench the saucepan out and hold it at arm's length. Rebecca has her by the arm and shoulder and is shaking her violently. Peter lowers his head again.]

JAROSLAV: Anna, tso tum sheln jayeh osspokoui sheln.

ANNA: Pushtsh mnye. Jaroslav, caymet.

[She tosses him the saucepan, which he catches and examines in surprise. Anna and Rebecca now have both hands free for each other.]

ANNA: Parshivar jidovka ti! Tishoukradva. Tishoukradva—ya Chiang zabeeah—pushtsh mnye.

[They struggle, and Jaroslav joins them to haul Rebecca. Anna slips backwards over Peter, who rolls over and gets up, swearing.]

PETER: Peeriestansie dratsa! Shtob vas rasnieslo!

ANNA: Nedowengate—pschonay tve chawor-stond.

JAROSLAV: Zostaff moiyou genelt.

PETER: Chorr! vozme.

[Jaroslav and Peter are pushing the women aside, all shouting at once, when Captain Ridley and Sergeant Barnes appear at the back of the pit and walk down the aisle towards the stage]

BARNES: (parade-ground voice) Shut up!

[There is a startled silence on the stage as they approach]

(to Ridley) This sort of thing the whole time, sir. I've got 'em half sorted out—French on this side, down here, Latts and Liths and Yugoslavs over here. The Dutch are all right, you can put them anywhere. (*He turns and calls up to the Circle*) Are there any more Balts or French still in the Circle? Shift if there are, because I'm coming up in a minute to see. (*To Ridley*) You can't trust 'em a yard.

[*They reach the orchestra pit, walking the last bit of the way backwards, Ridley looking up and taking stock of the house. Both are in battle dress, with Infantry flashes and Second Army divisional signs. Both are armed, Barnes with a Sten. Ridley is in the twenties, and wears an African campaign ribbon; Barnes is in the forties and has last war and '39-'45 ribbons.*]

RIDLEY: Who are that lot over there?

BARNES: Stateless—White Russians, Jews that want to get to Palestine, Greek exiles. Ha'porths of all sorts.

RIDLEY: Who have you got upstairs?

[*They come on to Stage.*]

BARNES: Still pretty mixed, sir. Poles, Dutch and Belgians in the Circle, Norwegians and Russians in the gallery. Bulgars and some Italians in the Circle Bar. Roumanians and some more Italians in the Stalls Bar and the foyer; and the dressing rooms are full of a bloody mixed bag.

[*They have now climbed up on to the stage.*]

RIDLEY: Who were those in the passage?

BARNES: A concentration camp the Yanks liberated, south of here. They're pretty weak, and there's a man in there—(*he indicates a box with the curtains*

drawn or a piece of sacking rigged across it) who's liable to conk out. He's got a woman looking after him.

RIDLEY: But the sick aren't supposed . . .

BARNES: What's supposed to happen never happens when you're dealing with D.Ps., sir.

RIDLEY: We don't want an epidemic on our hands.

BARNES (*nettled*): I've got a lot of corpses, sir, in the boiler room. . .

RIDLEY: God—whose?

BARNES (*good-natured again, having got his effect*): Jerries, sir. Shelterers, bombed out. Women and kids, mostly. The D.Ps. knifed the lot as soon as they found 'em.

RIDLEY: Oh, well. We never had the Germans in England. I suppose we can't say what we mightn't have done if we had.

BARNES: Not had much to do with D.Ps. before, sir, have you?

RIDLEY: Neither had you, till they opened this place up. Had you?

BARNES: O.K., sir.

RIDLEY: I suppose they all speak pretty good German?

BARNES: They've mostly been in German camps for three years or more, and the rest of 'em have had German occupation troops all over the shop. You'll find every man, woman and child in this theatre 'as had to understand German.

RIDLEY: Good. (*To the house*) Listen, all of you. I'm English, a British officer. I am sorry to have to talk to you like this in German but it's the only language we've got in common unless some of you understand bits of English. You get it, don't you? I'm English and I am talking in German to help you. That's what I'm here for, to help you get back towards your homes. This part of Germany is still a bit mixed up, because the fighting only stopped

the other day. If you'll co-operate, we'll do our best for you. Now—we've got to get you organised into two main convoys. Eastbound and Westbound. We've got to sort out what food and transport there is between you, and get as much more as we can for the rest. You're not compelled to stay here, but for those who do we shall eventually be able to arrange transport on to the next official camp, East or West. Right? Now—(to *Barnes*). Better fix up an office on the stage. We can keep an eye on things from here.

BARNES: Right, sir! Hey! Jerry! What's-your-name—Bauer! Bauer!

[*Bauer lets down a ladder from the flies and comes running down it. He is an elderly man, very respectably dressed. He has a convincing air of efficiency, which at the moment is overlaid with nervous anxiety. His ladder has descended in the middle of the stage, and he sticks close to the end of it, with a wary eye on both British and D.Ps.*]

BAUER: Here, sir, Herr Sergeant, I will be with you in one moment, sir . . .

BARNES: This is the stage manager of the theatre, I believe.

RIDLEY: Good Lord!

BARNES: Aye, he hid up there, sitting on that kind of grid, like a monkey, when the D.Ps. started arriving. I've kept them off him, because he's useful, but the moment you let him go he shoots up there again.

RIDLEY: I wonder he hasn't made a bolt for home.

BARNES: He's crazy about the theatre. Has an idea he can look after it so long as he's around. Keeps telling me they haven't got equipment like this in Russia.

BAUER' (*who is now on the stage*): Herr Sergeant!

BARNES: Now, look here, my lad, we want a table, chairs, paper.

BAUER: Sir, a table and—yes, Herr Sergeant, at once.

[He hesitates as to whether to leave his ladder there, and decides to risk it. He hurries off into the wings.]

RIDLEY: Where did you pick up the lingo, Sergeant Barnes?

BARNES: P.O.W. in the last war, sir. Three and a half years of it! Then I worked for a Tyneside shipping company, and they found out I had some German and gave me a rise if I'd go to the Hamburg office. I used to think Hamburg Docks had the Tower of Babel beat, but my God, sir, this little lot!

RIDLEY: I don't know. There's something here we'll never see again! The whole of Europe under one roof—the common people of all the back streets from Marseilles to Harbin, and the workers from the farms from Picardy to the Steppes.

BARNES (*realising that the Gods have sent him a Romanticist to work with*): Ye-es—I suppose you have, if you like to put it that way. I prefer the crowd in the NAAFI myself.

RIDLEY: They hauled me out from my unit for this job because of my languages, and sent me back down to Corps to brief me. Miles of roads, and I don't suppose I drove five hundred yards without passing a man or woman or a whole family on the trek. I passed a dozen of 'em resting their feet for a mile or two, clinging all over a steam roller.

BARNES: Believe it or not there's a man camped out up in the Circle bar who's got his old grandma on skates—hauls her along behind him with a rope round her waist. Old lady loves it! She sleeps in them, for fear they'll be pitched.

RIDLEY: It's the most dramatic, mass movement of a continent, the world has ever seen.

BARNES: It don't make much odds, sir, if they get under your feet, who the hell they are or where they're going.

[*Bauer returns, pushing before him an enormous table with a crimson leather top and carved and gilded legs.*]

RIDLEY: Phew!

BARNES: Tables, officers for the use of, one—that puts you a couple of jumps ahead of the Brigadier, I'd say, sir. He only rates a desk with drawers.

RIDLEY: Oh, no, that's a Colonel. And I rather think a full Colonel gets a carpet.

BAUER: We have carpets, sir, very fine ones, plain or patterned. With this, perhaps, Turkish . . .

RIDLEY: I suppose explaining jokes counts as fraternisation. Can I have a bit more light?

BAUER: In one moment, sir.

[*Bauer, bewildered but willing, produces a practical table-lamp which he plugs in.*]

RIDLEY: We'll have the lights up in the front of the house, too.

BAUER: No, sir, no, I'm sorry.

BARNES: They're on a different circuit, apparently.

BAUER: Yes, you see, sir, a different circuit and it's out of order.

RIDLEY: What, just a fuse blown?

BAUER: No, sir, all out of order, smashed. They got at the switches, sir, when they first arrived, trying to get the lights on and not knowing how. My switchboard, the stage switchboard—I kept an eye on *that*, of course. Would you believe it, sir, the bulbs—practically every one of them stolen—on the stairs and in the bars and passages and dressing rooms—they'd steal the bricks, and the plaster, sir,

if they thought they could sell them, thieves, every one of them—

RIDLEY: All right, finish that and then get cracking on fixing lights up somehow.

BAUER: Yes, sir. And some paper, sir. There should be paper on the table, for making lists and reports. That would look better . . . yes? (*Goes off L.*)

[*Ridley takes off his cap and his belt and revolver, and is laying the latter on the table when Barnes stops him.*]

RIDLEY: What?

BARNES: I shouldn't, sir.

RIDLEY: Oh rot, Barnes, they're our Allies. We shan't get them to co-operate if they see us swagging about like S.S. men.

BARNES: O.K., sir. (*To Rebecca*) Come on, hop it, Ma!

REBECCA: But where do I go?

[*Barnes starts moving the D.P.s. back, and is deflected by the ladder.*]

BARNES: You go and find yourself a nice quiet little place for the nipper. (*To D.P.s.*) Come on, now, there's not supposed to be anyone on the stage. There's plenty of room elsewhere. Move off, there.

[*Bauer disappears.*]

[*The others begin to move. Barnes comes down to Claudia.*]

Come on, now.

[*She looks up at him with such a terrifying lack of interest of understanding that he is disconcerted.*]

O.K., only no further on, see?

[*Rebecca and the Poles are moving, when Anna thinks Rebecca is making another grab for the saucepan, and the fight starts up again.*]

ANNA: Oh, you'd like to grab it again while I'm busy, would you? Well, I'm watching, see? I never take my eyes off you.

REBECCA (*at the same time*): Don't come near me. Don't you shout at me!

JAROSLAV: Be quiet, cow, or we'll have the English arrest you for a thief.

BARNES: Shut up!

[*The two women are at each other again. Barnes brings his Sten forward without unslinging it and pokes them apart.*]

RIDLEY: What's it all about, Barnes?

[*Both women rush at him, explaining volubly, followed by Jaroslav.*]

ANNA: She has no saucepan to warm the milk for her squalling brat (*pointing to the bundle on top of the luggage*). So she stole ours. They steal everything. Everything that does not belong to a Jew is fair game, isn't it?

REBECCA: She is a thief—she try to steal my things—you put her in prison (*her first words at the same time as Anna's, but shouted down*). She thought I was asleep and she came creeping over (*she gives an imitation of Anna's tiptoe approach that her bulk makes wobbling and ludicrous*). She thought no one would notice, picking among my things with her filthy thieving fingers. But I caught her at it, with her arm up to the elbow in my things!

JAROSLAV: Anna says it is our saucepan, and this woman hit her. She bit and kicked her, the dirty old slut.

REBECCA: And you can put him in prison too, he is her husband—if he is her husband.

RIDLEY: Hey! Steady on. Now then—(*to Jaroslav*) You—what are the women fighting about? That saucepan?

JAROSLAV: My wife says it is ours. The Jewess stole it.

ANNA: She hid it under her great pile of stolen luggage. What else have you got in there of ours—or other people's?

RIDLEY: Hold on. What nationality are you?

ANNA: }
JAROSLAV: } Polish.

RIDLEY: And you?

REBECCA: Polish.

ANNA: You, Polish! You gheřto Yid! She is a Jewess! Look at her! Look at all the things she has got! That is a Jewess for you!

RIDLEY (*surprised*): You little Nazi!

ANNA: I, a Nazi?

RIDLEY: You know whose doctrine that is? Adolf Hitler's. Give her the saucepan.

ANNA: It is my saucepan. I would know it anywhere . . . I've kept our things together. It's been difficult but we've kept our things together, Jaroslav and I—all our things and each other. That's ours, ours, keep it, Jaro! (*she thrusts the saucepan into Jaroslav's keeping*).

RIDLEY: Give it her.

Jaroslav gives it to Ridley, who gives it to Rebecca.]

REBECCA (*to Ridley*): No, it is not my saucepan. I must have put my things on it by chance.

ANNA: Ha!

REBECCA: But I am Jewish, so I must have stolen it. And when I say that I am Polish, what do you suppose that I mean? I live in Poland, and therefore I hate the Poles more than any country. That is what the country we live in means to us Jews.

[She spits in the saucepan and tosses it to Anna, who catches it automatically, and then shudders with disgust and flings it away.]

BARNES: All right, that'll do. Beat it. Off the stage, now. This is the Orderly Room. There's plenty of other places. Now off with you. Come on love, go and find that nice comfy cubby hole.

[He hustles the Poles off on one side, Rebecca on the other. They remain, just in sight, on the fringes of the stage, glowering at each other.]

RIDLEY: Not quite a Solomon, am I? Still, the principle was right. A saucepan today; the right to trade tomorrow.

BARNES: Big waste of time if you ask me, sir.

RIDLEY: Were you never on a charge, Sergeant?

BARNES (*grinning*): Aye, once or twice, sir, when you were still throwing teddy-bears out of your pram.

RIDLEY: And didn't the officer hear both sides of the case?

BARNES (*reminiscently*): Not bloody likely.

RIDLEY: Well, we've got to start with justice.

[Bauer returns with a pile of paper and a property inkstand of gigantic proportions. He sets them down on the table. Ridley laughs and examines the inkstand, as Barnes pulls two huge Chinese screens to make an "office" around the desk.]

But, no ink.

BAUER: Ink! No! No, I never thought of that.

RIDLEY: I use a fountain pen.

BAUER: Actors are not expected really to write. But I will get some. I will get some at once.

RIDLEY: I said I use a fountain pen.

BAUER: Er—Captain?

RIDLEY (*writing*): Um?

BAUER: There would be no chance of putting the theatre to its proper use? Of putting on plays here for your troops? If these people were moved out, sir . . . This is one of the best theatres in Germany.

Great actors have told me there are no better accoustics in Europe, and I have worked myself in Berlin, Hamburg, Munich. There is the best possible lighting, fine scene docks. You could stage here anything from opera to Shakespeare.

RIDLEY: Even an ENSA concert party?

BAUER: ENSA?

RIDLEY: Never mind—that's what you'd get anyway.

BAUER: If these people were moved out—

RIDLEY: Sure, we're here to keep them moving.

BAUER: They are the scum of the earth, sir, you have only to look . . .

RIDLEY: That'll do. They won the war. You lost it. Beat it, but stick around.

[*The Stage Manager goes up his ladder.*]

BARNES (*calls after him as he goes*): Our "scum of the earth" have him scared stiff.

[*The ladder is hauled up and disappears. Meanwhile Jiri, a small elderly Czech slips out of rostrum from underneath during last lines of Ridley's, with a bundle. He pays no attention to anybody. He opens his bundle during the ensuing dialogue, and arranges an assortment of mixed rubbish carefully. It includes a flat wide piece of boarding. As Ridley finishes, he slips off again, leaving his things.*]

RIDLEY: Corps said we were to get this lot shifted and to expect several hundred a day for the next few days. The first thing to do is to get them sorted out by nationalities, Eastbound and Westbound. (*Jiri off at "Westbound."*) We'd better get the Eastbound off first. We'd better get all the Eastbound on the floor of the house and in the downstairs offices and dressing-rooms; Westbound, anything above. You've got them all mixed up anyhow at the moment.

BARNES: Sir, I've got them—

RIDLEY: Sorry, Sergeant, I didn't mean that. You've done wonders to get them sorted out at all; but we must get Russians, Poles, Yugoslavs, Greeks, etc., all together.

BARNES: Can't be done, sir.

RIDLEY: What?

BARNES: That's just why I sorted 'em—to keep them apart. You can't put Russians and Poles next to each other.

RIDLEY: Of course you can!

BARNES: They're the very ones you can't, sir.

[*Re-enter Jiri.*]

Why, you can't even put two Yugoslavs next to each other, if one comes from Croatia and t'other's a Serb.

RIDLEY: But it's got to be done.

BARNES (*firmly*): The nearer they live back home, the further apart I've kept them in this theatre. It's the only way.

[*Little Jiri slips back onto the stage with an open wooden framework—the sides of a wide shallow packing case—which he deposits on top of his piece of board, and slips off again.*]

RIDLEY: What the devil's he up to?—Sooner or later, you know, they've got to live next door to each other again . . .

BARNES: Not while I'm looking after them, sir.

RIDLEY: We can't worry our heads about anything else just now.

BARNES (*stubbornly*): Whatever way you're looking at it, you're going to have bloodshed if you put the Russians and Poles next to each other in the pit.

RIDLEY (*not arguing any more*): Sort them out, Sergeant: Westbound upstairs, Eastbound downstairs.

[Jiri slips on again with a hammer and screws, which he deposits and goes off again at once, as Barnes turns to go.]

What is that little man doing, flitting in and out like a sparrow building a nest? (*He looks at the pile of rubbish*) Of all the rubbish—Destructive devils they are, whatever it is he's making he's pulled half Germany to bits to get the parts. Well, I suppose that's what we've been fighting for.

[Barnes has turned back just as he was leaving.]

BARNES: Sir?

RIDLEY: Well?

BARNES: What do you want done with people who aren't bound anywhere?

RIDLEY: There are no Germans here, surely—except Jews, and they must have had homes somewhere.

BARNES: No, sir, but we've got Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, for instance. They're staying put, they say.

RIDLEY: Oh. Well, they can't stay put in this theatre. They'll have to go on to the nearest official camp.

BARNES: Latts and Liths with the Russians, sir?

RIDLEY: Eastbound downstairs, Sergeant.

BARNES: Very good, sir.

[He turns and comes down to the footlights, and calls out.]

Listen, all of you: we've got to get you all set to move out to the transport when we're ready. Anybody that lives East of Germany when they're at home, move out on to the stairs. Take your things with you, and move out on to the *left* side of the stairs. Don't come down till we've made room for you. All right . . . ?

[There is a confused murmur from the gallery and

circle, coming if possible from loud-speakers, otherwise from the five available members of the cast scattered about the house.]

People whose homes are East of Germany and aren't in the stalls or the pit, move out, and wait. Pass that on to the people in the bars. (*To Ridley*) I'll leave the folk in the boxes till we're all set, sir, and that man that's really bad, we'll ask them at the Camp to send an ambulance for him when we get there. I'll just tell them behind.

[There is a good deal of confused noise, both from the speakers or people in the auditorium, and from the people on the stage. Barnes calls back as he goes.]

And less row. This isn't Covent Garden Market.

[As Barnes goes off behind Ridley speaks to the people on the stage.]

RIDLEY: That applies to you people on the stage, too. (*To Peter*) Where are you from?

PETER: I am Russian. (*Exit U/S L.*)

RIDLEY: O.K., you stay down here. And you?

[He speaks to Claudia, who seems to hear him without paying any attention.]

Where is your home?

[She shakes her head.]

CLAUDIA: Mine?

RIDLEY: Where did you live?

CLAUDIA (*concentrating with an effort*): I travelled.

RIDLEY: Are you ill?

[She does not answer, and he gives it up. There is a loud noise from the circle bar, or the approaches to the circle.]

[The Polish Professor bursts in, and rushes down to the balustrade. He is an elderly, civilised looking person, on whom the rags he wears sit like fancy dress.]

PROFESSOR (*over his shoulder as he breaks in*): I tell you we won't! We won't! We shan't have to. The soldier got it wrong, or you heard it wrong. It would be murder. (*To the stage*) You down there, sir, you, the British officer!

RIDLEY: Something wrong?

PROFESSOR: I've told them you don't mean it. They say you're sending us East with the Russians.

RIDLEY: If you're going East, yes, I am. Where are you from?

PROFESSOR: Poland. You can't do it. You don't understand. It's murder.

RIDLEY: Rot.

PROFESSOR: You don't understand. The Russians will kill us. You can't make us go with them. We're your Allies!

RIDLEY: So are the Russians. Move out on to the stairs, as the Sergeant ordered.

PROFESSOR: I will not be silenced. I am a man of education. It is my duty to speak for these people. Are you the S.S., to listen to no one?

RIDLEY: If you've a complaint, come down here and make it.

PROFESSOR: I'm coming. I am coming down. Don't move, the rest of you. Stay where you are. I'll explain to this young fool. You're safe here.

[*He goes out.*]

[*Ridley has turned back to his desk. Barnes comes on from behind.*]

BARNES: Trouble, sir?

RIDLEY: Some crazy old Pole coming down to register a complaint. All well behind?

BARNES: Yes, sir. And a Corporal came from the M.T. people with the trucks. He had orders to take his drivers back, though.

RIDLEY: That's right. We're supposed to find D.P. drivers.

BARNES: I signed for the trucks, sir. Here's the counterfoil.

[Ridley takes the counterfoil and pins it to a paper on his desk.]

[Firi has slipped on again, armed with a screw driver. Paying no attention to the others he upturns an armchair which is part of the junk lying about the stage and begins to unscrew the castors.]

BARNES (noticing Firi): Hey, you—

[Ridley puts a hand on Barnes's arm, stopping him.]

RIDLEY (softly): What is he at?

BARNES: Bats, I should say. I'll shoo him off. Here—

RIDLEY: Leave him, we don't want to start any more hares—It's keeping him quiet. An armchair—

[They watch for a moment in silence, while Firi finishes unscrewing the first castor, and begins to screw it to his board.]

He's taking the castors off. Making a trailer, of course, for his stuff.

BARNES: Neat. Still, you wanted the stage cleared—

RIDLEY: Oh, let him finish it, poor old devil. He's worked it all out. Spent the last couple of years probably, in a slave-camp somewhere, working it out, to give himself something to keep his mind on.

BARNES: Take up more room in the truck when he's finished it.

RIDLEY: I know, but he may need it later—we're only guaranteeing the trucks for the next stage—he may have a couple of thousand miles of trek before him, one way and another.

[He turns back to his papers with a sigh.]

RIDLEY: Barnes, how did you think the war would end?

BARNES: Like the last one . . .

RIDLEY: I never visualised myself running a bus service for Lithuanians in a fleet of captured German trucks.

BARNES: You go on thinking of it as reconstructing Europe, sir. You get more for your money that way.

RIDLEY: Well, get the French, Dutch and Co. moving upstairs, and we'll be all set to move the Eastbound down.

BARNES (*to the house*)⁴. Any Westbound that are downstairs, up you go. Keep to your left on the stairs.

[*Duval comes from the wings. He is a French farmer in a small way, young middle-aged, accustomed to obeying officialdom.*]

DUVAL: Upstairs? How does one . . . are there stairs behind?

BARNES: Dutch?

DUVAL: French, Sergeant; Duval, Jean Marie Claude, farmer, St. Valembert, Department de Seine-et-Oise, not married.

BARNES: O.K., O.K., French. Upstairs. Through the front.

DUVAL: Yes, Sergeant, thank you very much, Sergeant. Through the front—

BARNES: Jump down, I'll pass 'em to you.

[*Duval jumps down cautiously into the auditorium and Barnes passes his luggage down.*]

Used to red tape, aren't you?

DUVAL (*hastily*): Oh yes, Sergeant—you can't be a farmer and not be accustomed to questionnaires. Luckily, I'm fond of music; at home, when I used to see a lot of forms to fill in, I used to say: "Good"! and turn on the radio.

PROFESSOR: Let me up.

[*The Professor has come down through the stalls and tries to climb past Duval.*]

BARNES: Hey, what's all this?

PROFESSOR: I must speak to the officer. It is life and death; and he doesn't understand.

BARNES: This your Pole, sir?

RIDLEY: Yes, let him up, Sergeant.

PROFESSOR: Yes, yes. You don't understand about Europe.

BARNES: Dead right there, anyhow.

[*Barnes hauls the Professor up on to the stage.*]

[*Duval goes off by the nearest stalls exit.*]

PROFESSOR: You cannot put us with the Russians. You are not our enemies.

RIDLEY: Neither are they, you know. Are you *really* scared!

PROFESSOR: Yes, I am afraid. But I am not afraid to admit I am a coward. I have been nearly six years in a concentration camp for dangerous intellectuals. You know what happens to dangerous intellectuals in concentration camps? They become harmless lunatics.

BARNES: He's frank, sir, anyhow.

PROFESSOR: I kept my life and (*with a look at Barnes*) my sanity through all that, yet I am afraid, still, to go Eastwards with the Russians.

RIDLEY: The Russians are your allies.

PROFESSOR: The Russians are my enemies. They took one half of my country, Germany the other. The Germans have been driven out—

RIDLEY: By the Russians—

PROFESSOR: And now the whole of my country is under their heel.

[*Jaroslav and Anna have come forward as he speaks and Peter is listening.*]

ANNA: He is right. We will not travel with the Russians.

RIDLEY (*to Professor*): You see? You stir up trouble. These people were perfectly prepared to . . .

JAROSLAV: We never meant to. We are from the part the Russians took in 1939.

RIDLEY: Could you have defended yourselves against the Germans if the Russians had not been there to protect you?

ANNA: The Russians weren't fighting the Germans. They were their allies. The Russians came to our village the day we heard the Germans were bombing Warsaw.

[*A sudden thunderous hammering makes everyone jump. It emanates from Firi who has now screwed the castors of the original armchair and another along the sides of his platform of boarding, and is starting to nail the packing-case framework round the edge.*]

BARNES: Here, stow that!

[*Firi looks up, quickly leaping between Barnes and his possessions, hammer in hand.*]

Less row. Screw it on—glue it on—but shut up.

[*Firi retires and continues to work with complete absorption, using screws.*]

PROFESSOR: It makes little difference if you have two enemies, that they hate each other too.

RIDLEY: Wait. (*Giving it up—to Jaroslav*) Before you listened to him, were you really afraid of the Russians? Wouldn't you have travelled East in the convoy we're arranging—

JAROSLAV: Not a few at a time, no.

RIDLEY (*noticing Peter*): Look, here is a Russian. His brother perhaps helped to liberate your concentration camp.

JAROSLAV: They have my brother in a concentration camp in Russia.

RIDLEY (*to Professor*): Come on, does he look like a Communist bogey?

PROFESSOR: He is probably not even a member of the Party. (*To Peter*) Are you? •

PETER: I? Oh, no—you don't get to be a Party member just like that.

PROFESSOR: What is the difference? The Russian Empire does not need a Czar to be imperialist.

RIDLEY: Well, I don't believe he considers himself *your* enemy. (*To Peter*) Do you? Do you hate the Poles? •

PETER (*good-humouredly*): I don't know very much about them—they say quite a lot of them speak Russian.

PROFESSOR: He means when they swallow up a country, it makes it easier if they have already occupied it once or twice before, in Latvia—in Estonia—Lithuania . . .

RIDLEY: Now, that wasn't what he meant, was it?

PETER: No. It is more friendly if you talk the same way.

PROFESSOR: Friendly!

PETER: Inside Russia we have many languages. I have to make myself understood everywhere.

RIDLEY: What's your job?

PETER: I'm an Agricultural Mechanisation Instructor, Second Class. I teach farm workers to drive tractors, and run creamery separators, and all that. At home, agriculture is very highly mechanised.

RIDLEY: And you travel?

PETER: Mongolia, the Caucasus, Turkestan.

BARNES: Good lord. Tough job, eh?

PETER: It is interesting, instructing, don't you find? You think each time: this time they *have* given me idiots. And then you watch the stupidity going out of their eyes, over days and weeks. No? And then you see them begin to *feel* the machinery. I've seen

a backward peasant yelp and jump away the first time a machine was started up, and two months later I've seen him look up at me suddenly when the machine came alive under his hands like a small boy that's been given a present of a leetle live dog. *You know?*

BARNES: I've never seen a recruit look even plain grateful, let alone loving.

RIDLEY (*to Professor*): Now Professor, I'd call that a particularly good type—an ordinary decent chap, with a yen for things that tick over, certainly not an international menace. (*To Peter*) I'm right, aren't I? You don't intend these Poles any harm, do you? You've nothing against living peacefully with them?

PETER: With some, no. Him—(*indicating the Professor with a smile*) and her—(*indicating Anna without looking at her*) and the Jewess with the child.

JAROSLAV: Old men, and women. You see?

PETER: Not him (*indicating Jaroslav*).

RIDLEY: Oh Lord! Not you too?

ANNA: You're not taking me from him. You tried that before. (*To Ridley*) They tried, when they invaded Poland, when they first came to our village. He was to learn new methods because they were going to make collective the farms, he was to go to some training camp in Russia. I wouldn't let him go, I knew I'd never see him again. He's good, stupid, he'd have done what they said. Oh, no. I made him come away, at night.

JAROSLAV: There wasn't anywhere to go to, you know.

ANNA: No, because my aunt's village was in the part the Germans took, and the Germans got us. We stayed together through all *that* and you shan't part, us now.

PROFESSOR (*amazed, not disbelieving*): How could

you manage to keep together? It was impossible. No one managed to keep together.

JAROSLAV (*gently*): We did.

PROFESSOR: How?

ANNA (*fiercely*): By loving enough. What d'you think?

JAROSLAV: At the end, when I was no more use at the labour camp and they sent me to the death camp for the gas-chamber—she came too.

RIDLEY: God.

JAROSLAV: She hid in the truck, and came too . . .

ANNA: Now we're free, do you think I'd go on a Russian convoy without him?

RIDLEY (*to Peter*): Obviously they can't be separated. Now—

PETER: Search him. He's armed.

PROFESSOR (*to Ridley*): Oh God, why can't you understand?

PETER: That man doesn't come with us.

RIDLEY: He does.

PETER: Search him.

RIDLEY: He's not allowed to carry firearms. (*To Jaroslav*) For Heaven's sake show him you're not armed.

PROFESSOR (*quickly*): Is this the way you treat your allies?

RIDLEY: Well, I'm damned! (*To Jaroslav*) Turn out your pockets.

PROFESSOR: You are in league with them! Your government has agreed to herd us like sheep into their clutches!

[*He makes a grab at Ridley's revolver, which is lying on the desk. Barnes is behind him and jabs the muzzle of the Sten into the small of his back.*]

BARNES: Drop that . . . Lay off, Dad. Be your age

[*Ridley puts on his belt and holster.*]

RIDLEY: Now then, turn out your pockets, or I'll have you searched.

[Jaroslav still hesitates. He looks at Anna. Barnes takes a step forward. Anna nods. Jaroslav slowly produces the revolver that was tucked under his armpit and throws it on the table. Barnes examines it and pockets it.]

BARNES: One of ours! Been robbing the dead, chum?

PROFESSOR (to Ridley, disregarding the last line): What do you suppose that proves? Only that he is afraid. Do you go armed unless you are afraid? Even if we go back towards Western Poland with them, do you think we shall be safe? He knows very well he would never get that far. That is why he goes armed.

RIDLEY: All I know is you're allies, and you're going to act as such. I'm not prepared to discuss the history of Poland, or anywhere else, with you. You're clearly (to Professor) out to make trouble. You stay on the stage where I can see you.

BARNES (as Professor is about to speak): Over there.

[The Professor goes to position indicated, at a distance from Jaroslav and Anna. The others fall back, muttering among themselves.]

You'll never get 'em to kiss and make friends, sir.

RIDLEY (who is beginning to get ruffled): Now—we've got five three-ton trucks, two T.C.Vs. and four German trucks. Right?

BARNES: And a couple of mechanised milk-floats from the dairy on the corner. Hold five or six, with baggage.

RIDLEY: Call it a hundred all told. Get the hundred nearest the doors outside and cram as many on the transport as you can. Start behind. Pick reliable-looking drivers, and go in the last truck yourself.

BARNES: I'll get some Lätts and Liths to drive.

They don't want to go East, so they're more likely to play ball, and come back for the next load.

RIDLEY: Somehow I've never thought of a Lithuanian driving a truck. It oughtn't to take you more than three hours, there and back. They mustn't take any food, by the way. They'll get plenty at the Camp, and we shall need all there is in the theatre for the ones that have to stay overnight. All right, carry on.

[*Barnes salutes and goes off.*]

We shall need a food store. What's your name—Bauer!

BAUER (*above*): Yes, sir?

RIDLEY: Come here. I want a small, cool room for use as a food store.

[*Bauer comes on from the side.*]

BAUER: Yes, sir. The paint store. It is locked. I have the keys. But where shall I put my paint?

RIDLEY: In the furnace, for all I care.

BAUER: Sir, you will need the theatre afterwards. Whoever will be the audience, there will always be plays.

RIDLEY: Put the paints in the boiler room and lock that up too.

BAUER: The boiler room, sir? There are dead people there.

RIDLEY: I know. I'll get the Town Major to find a German burial party in the morning.

BAUER (*shuddering*): I . . . have seen them . . .

RIDLEY (*dropping his impersonal manner*): That's all right, I've been through Belsen.

[*The sound of voices in violent argument are heard approaching from behind. Milosh and Draja appear, the former carrying a huge sack. They are both young Yugoslavs, Milosh a partisan and Draja a regular soldier. They are followed by Barnes.*]

MILOSH: You would not dare to shoot!

DRAJA: He would shoot you on sight for the bandit you are, if he knew you.

BARNES: Sorry, sir. I didn't care to start shooting in the street without orders, and he knew it.

RIDLEY: Who are they? Ours?

BARNES: Yes, sir. Yugoslavs.

RIDLEY: What, both of them? Then what's the trouble?

BARNES: This one's got all the bread he liberated from a bakery this morning, and he won't leave it.

RIDLEY: You'll get fed at the Camp. It is run by the Allied Military Government, and they have got UNRRA supplies laid on. There's no need to worry.

BARNES: He won't leave it in case this fellow gets any.

RIDLEY: Well, why shouldn't he?

MILOSH: So you feed collaborators?

BARNES: This one is supposed to have fought for the Germans.

DRAJA: I'm a soldier, a regular soldier, sir. I fought the Germans for nine months, while *he* was on their side—because they had a treaty with Russia.

MILOSH: A Chetnik!

DRAJA: Yes, a Chetnik. A guerilla. I was in the mountains for four years, sir.

RIDLEY: And you?

MILOSH: A partisan.

DRAJA: A Communist bandit!

MILOSH: Collaborator!

[*Barnes gestures despairingly and Ridley sinks back at his table, clutching his head.*]

BARNES: They've always got each other to hate, bless them. Shall I—?

RIDLEY: No, Barnes. That would be the beginning of the end.

MILOSH: I would sooner the bread were burned than given to him.

DRAJA: I am not a politician. I am a soldier. Look, you can understand (*he turns despairingly from Ridley to Barnes, indicating his medal ribbons*). You've been a soldier a long time. I was a soldier, going where I was sent. Could I tell if the strategy was right or wrong? Our company commander wasn't the sort to explain. (*Apologetically to Ridley*) You know how it is, sir, sometimes. But you don't argue. There is a war. You do what you are told. Sometimes we fought; sometimes we waited. When we fought, we won. These bandits just came plundering and looting. If they took a village, they seized all the land. If they lost it, there were reprisals, and the village was burned. And now comes this bandit, and says that because his friends came into the war in the end, we must starve. He knows I was a Chetnik. He will denounce me.

MILOSH: And if you stay here, they will not feed collaborators.

BARNES: I think it's this row, sir, between Tito and Mihailovitch.

[*Milosh springs to attention and gives the partisan salute and official cry.*]

MILOSH: Tito! Tito! Tito!

RIDLEY: Bit reminiscent, isn't it?

DRAJA (*to Milosh*): Where are my wife and children? (*To Ridley*) She was young, we were married just before the war. Her father was Quartermaster at the barracks; he gave us a room in his house. We never had a real home, even, but she kept that room so—like a home, and everything so shining, always.

MILOSH (*to Ridley*): The Fascist's pretending to be crazy now. I've never laid eyes on his wife.

DRAJA (*to Ridley*): It was a little garrison town, sir, at the foot of the pass. We in the Army—we took

to the hills. So these scum must show how brave they are by murdering some German guards at the entrance to the pass. Then they slink back into the city and leave the Germans to take their revenge on us. They knew the Germans would think it was the Chetniks in the hills. They locked the gates and burned the barracks. The women were inside. And the children . . . Where's *his* wife? She's safe, alive, in her slum somewhere, because she's not a soldier's wife, a Chetnik's wife, a *collaborator's* wife!

BARNES: Set fire to the married quarters, the swine!

MILOSH: They all have some hard luck story.

BARNES: Shut up. (*To Ridley*) Is he a collaborator, sir?—within the meaning of the act?

RIDLEY: I'm not qualified to sort it out. It makes no difference to my order, anyway. (*To Milosh*) Hand over the bread.

MILOSH: Not without guarantee it won't be fed to fascists. You listen to him because he says he did only what he was ordered. Are you going to listen to that excuse when you try the men who broke and branded us in the prison camps? He was "only on the wrong side". What right has he to be on the wrong side? The right of stupidity and ignorance—it isn't true, no man has the right any longer. You do not need great education and learning now to know the truth.

PROFESSOR: Then you are very lucky.

MILOSH: Lucky! If you call it lucky, the way we have learned with hunger and idleness and no hope, and now in war and blood instead of in your books and cloisters. Oh, I could tell a sad story, too, as well as he, but I am looking forward there will always be enough, like him, looking back, with their own little tragedies, and no time to think of the world's. We have won, now, at last. We have our chance. If we let one known fascist get away with it—

PROFESSOR (*to Ridley*): The soldiers of General Mihailovitch were not fascists, they were—

MILOSH: They were not with us. They could have been, and they were not. There are only two forces, now, and from now on; those that are with us, and those that are against us.

RIDLEY: There will always be a fence, so long as there's an England. All right, now you've had your say too, hand over the bread. •

PETER: He's right. The man is a fascist. No one forced him to join the Chetniks. He could have been a Partisan.

[*Marie, a young French Communist, a firebrand of a girl and very attractive, comes to the edge of the gallery and screams.*]

MARIE: You are right, Comrade. Make him lock up the Fascist.

RIDLEY: This is an order. Hand it over. Be quick.

[*Milosh finds himself obeying the tone and handing over the bag to Barnes, who takes it and puts it behind him.*]

MARIE: And he's not the only Fascist in the place! There are some up here, amongst the French. Don't worry, we'll not divide the food with them, either.

PETER (*to Marie*): You are right, Comrade. He should not be fed.

MARIE: No Fascist should be fed.

RIDLEY: Another trouble-maker. (*Calling*) Come down here, Mademoiselle. I want to talk to you.

MARIE: I'll come down; and I'll bring some news with me. Yes, names! I know you—(*to gallery*) and you won't get away with it for ever! You wait!

[*She goes from gallery.*]

RIDLEY (*to Milosh*): What happens to the food here is my affair.

MILOSH: Then I stay too. I didn't denounce that man for nothing.

BARNES: Well, I know one of the places where I don't want to spend my demob. leave.

PETER (*to Milosh and following Draja with eyes*): Go, if you have a place in the first convoy. We'll watch him for you.

ANNA: Everyone'll watch him. If he collaborated with the Italians and Germans, he shouldn't be fed, whatever nationality he is.

RIDLEY: The Chetnik—(*indicating Draja*) goes with the first lot. I'll hang on to the partisan.

BARNES: If you're going to keep everyone that wants watching on the stage, sir, you'll have no one left in the audience.

RIDLEY: See the Commandant himself when you get to the Camp. Let him know what's been said.

PROFESSOR: And have them victimise him at the Camp, instead of here?

RIDLEY: The Camp is under Military Government. He won't be victimised. Get back there and stop fomenting trouble.

[*Barnes whispers to Ridley, who glances up at the curtained box.*]

Yes, by God. (*To Professor*) You were a doctor before you were a University Professor, weren't you?

PROFESSOR: Yes.

RIDLEY: I've got work for you. There's a man up in that box who's dying. *That's* where you belong.

PROFESSOR: I am not a physician. I have not practised—

RIDLEY: You mean you've heard the man's a Russian.

[*The Professor whips round on him, and is about to answer furiously, when he sees that Ridley really meant it. He looks at him for a moment in silence and*

then marches across the stage, looking up at the box, and disappears into the wings on that side.]

[Just as he passes Jiri the attention of the others on the stage who are watching him is caught by Jiri, who has finished the basic construction of his platform-trailer and now produces an umbrella, just the handle and spokes of which remain. It is a very large one.]

(Pointing, to Barnes) Barnes, look! I'm getting a fixation about that man. What is he doing now?

BARNES: An umbrella—

RIDLEY: More like a bathing tent.

[Jiri has opened it. It is of the kind fixed over cafe tables abroad.]

BARNES: I told you, sir. He's bats.

[Jiri closes the umbrella and slots the handle of the umbrella into a stand screwed to the middle of his wheeled platform. He climbs up on one of the arm-chairs from which he has stripped the castors, and slips over the umbrella a light tarpaulin which he has obviously cut and sewn to fit it. He clambers down and opens the umbrella. As he fastens the front sides of the tarpaulin to the edges of the base with the rings and hooks prepared, the effect is a cross between a rococco canopied bed and a Victorian bathing tent.]

RIDLEY *(speaking during the action, as the design becomes clear)* But he isn't bats—he's not bats by a long chalk—look, a tent; push it or pull it with your little mound of rubbish on board; half a minute to turn it into shelter at night.

[Everyone on the stage has been watching, intrigued. Peter steps forward, delighted with it. Instantly Jiri springs in front of it, fiercely protective.]

PETER: No. It's good. Clever. Very good.

BARNES: It's O.K., chum, he's only taking a look.

(*To Ridley*) I know he's got to be a sort of mascot for you, sir, but I do think we should get him moving. (*To Jiri*) Hey, big chief, where are you sailing for?

JIRI (*still protecting his erection*): Nowhere.

BARNES: Mm? I mean, where are you bound? Where's your home?

[*Jiri shakes his head and piles one or two of his possessions off the mound on the floor into the tent.*]

RIDLEY: Where's your home?

[*Jiri shakes his head, protective again as Ridley approaches. His whole being is concentrated on what he is doing.*]

JIRI: No home.

RIDLEY: Where are you going to live?

[*Jiri, only anxious to shut them up and get on with it, jerks a thumb over his shoulder, indicating the tent.*]

Snail-shell, eh?

BARNES (*aside*): Doesn't look like a Jew. Gypsy, maybe?

RIDLEY (*aside*): Heavens no. Kept a tobacconist's shop somewhere. (*To Jiri*) Your own place, your own people? You'll be going back to your friends, somewhere.

JIRI: No place.

BARNES: Blitzed, I bet. (*To Jiri*) Bombed out, were you?

JIRI (*quite mildly*): No.

RIDLEY: Well then, you'll have somewhere to go back to. Where did you live?

JIRI (*expressionlessly*): Lidice.

BARNES (*flatly*): Lidice.

RIDLEY (*after a pause, turning away abruptly*): All right, carry on.

[*Firi nods, relieved, and continues unmoved with his work, stacking his goods inside. Peter gives him a hand with lowering the umbrella.*]

(*To Barnes*) And the Major at Corps said: "It's just a question of sorting 'em and justling 'em out from under our feet . . . Lidice . . . Where's your home ?

BARNES: Huddersfield.

RIDLEY: Gloucestershire. (*They are both silent for a moment*) Married man ?

BARNES: Well—yes and no.

RIDLEY: Sorry.

BARNES: Oh, that's O.K., sir. It never killed me. Bit of a slut, between ourselves. Redhead. Baked beans out of a tin—and never wash up a meal till you've got no crockery left for the next. But her hair!—She left me when I thought of going for that job in the Hamburg office of our line. She'd taken up with a foreman in the yards. She'd cut her hair off by then. But I "did" that foreman, though!

[*Duval runs in through the stalls and clambers up on to the stage, calling wildly to Ridley as he comes.*]

DUVAL: She's coming down. She's going to denounce me! You mustn't pay any attention, sir. I brought no food with me. I did not like to rob the farmers as I came through. I am an honest man, sir, and I relied on the promise of the British that Displaced Persons would be fed. If you let her denounce me I shall starve!

RIDLEY: Steady on. Everything's under control. No one in this theatre's going to starve. You're French too, aren't you ?

DUVAL: Yes, Captain, a farmer from Seine-et-Oise. She is a little city-bred Communist, she doesn't know what she's talking about.

BARNES (*wearily*): Shall I get the first lot off, sir ?

RIDLEY: Not yet. Stay around till we get to the

bottom of this new schemozzle. Do you suppose we should fight like this at home?

DUVAL: Mon Capitaine, are you going to listen to her? They are all like this. Anyone that doesn't agree with them is a Fascist.

RIDLEY: Because anyone that doesn't agree with *you* is an anarchist. (*To Barnes*) I don't believe we're any good at politics, thank God.

DUVAL: Oh, God, *you* talk and talk—what are you going to do? I have been two and a half years doing forced labour in Germany. I want to get back to my farm, my land—you must listen to me.

RIDLEY: I am listening to everybody.

BARNES: You certainly are, sir.

[*Marie appears—from behind, if practicable, otherwise in the stalls, talking as she comes.*]

MARIE: I came down the back way—but he got here first, I see! (*pointing dramatically*). Collaborator! Jean Duval, collaborator! Captain, we will form a Committee to divide up the food between those who must stay tonight. Don't worry, we are efficient, we of the Resistance! I organised the distribution of propaganda leaflets through three suburbs, while he stayed on his farm and grew food for the Germans.

DUVAL: She worked in a munition factory for them.

MARIE: I had to—I was conscripted.

DUVAL: And I had to—the food was requisitioned.

MARIE: You were paid for it. You took their money.

DUVAL: And you got wages, didn't you? And you took them.

MARIE: We had to live, to carry on the Resistance.

DUVAL: I would have died rather than make their shells.

MARIE: Dud shells—one in ten, sometimes.

DUVAL: And the nine others?

MARIE: He is a fool of a petit-bourgeois, Captain,

he doesn't understand. Don't worry, we will see to it. You—(to *Milosh*) will distinguish between your countrymen, Comrade, and I between mine. We will find someone who knows the Dutch, and Belgians and the others. You—(to *Peter*) must be Chairman, because you will be impartial.

RIDLEY: God Almighty!

BARNES: Blimey!

DUVAL: Don't let them, sir! I have hidden two escaped prisoners, Mon Capitaine, Canadians from Montreal. I will give you their addresses. But my farm—

PETER: You could have burned your farm. We burned ours.

DUVAL: Burn my farm? Yours didn't belong to you. It's easy to burn what does not belong to you.

MARIE: We didn't fight so that he could grow fat again in his dairies and put up the price of milk for the children of the slums.

DRAJA: The man's no more a Fascist than I am. He is a farmer, like I am a soldier.

DUVAL: It will be the same when we get home—if we ever get home. They will seize the power.

RIDLEY: It doesn't matter a hoot in hell what your politics are, or your profession, or your religions. Will you get that into your heads? Democracy is what you've been fighting for, and Democracy is what you're going to get—and that includes food for people who don't agree with you.

MILOSH: We'll force their hands. Quick, destroy the food! All of you, destroy the food (*he makes a grab at the sack of bread*).

BARNES: You ruddy idiot, what's the good of trying to do that?

[*Milosh hits out at Barnes, Jaroslav and Draja come to the Sergeant's assistance, Peter to Milosh's.*]

[*Duval makes an attempt to get away, and Marie*

grabs over the edge of the stage and holds him by the hair. Anna and Rebecca become involved in the first group, and Marie calls for help and Peter breaks away from the first group, and comes to her. Ridley and Barnes, trying to break up the first group with the butts of their guns, become hopelessly entangled, and the first group begins to melt into the second and to spill with it over the edge of the stage. Claudia watches throughout with seeing but unconcerned eyes. Barnes follows the struggle as it moves down. Ridley disentangles himself and fires his revolver into the air. There is immediately a startled silence.]

RIDLEY: Right. Get back, all of you. You—(to Claudia) over there with them. Line up over there, the lot of you. You too, over there, right back.

[Claudia, clutching her case, gets up in a vague, docile way. Barnes wheels round and covers the house with his Sten, Ridley covers the combatants with his revolver as they climb back on to the stage. Jaroslav is staunching the blood from a wound in the shoulder, Peter wiping and putting away a knife.]

That'll do. Now then.

[He signs to Barnes, who adjusts his position so that he can cover them as well as the audience. Jaroslav is on the ground. All the D.Ps are right back on the fringes of the visible stage.]

We've had enough of this. I'm not going to believe that there's no solution.

[There is a moment's silence, then Marie speaks quietly.]

MARIE: You're the stumbling-block to the solution, you know.

RIDLEY (*surprised*): What was that?

MARIE: It's you who cause all the trouble, with your

amateur theories, trying to reorganise Europe according to the British Public School code.

RIDLEY (*amused*): Oh, come, Mademoiselle, you can do better than that!

MARIE: No, I'm serious. Stop pointing that ridiculous revolver at me. It's perfectly simple. You want an efficient organisation and peace and quiet, and you have stood about for the last 'three-quarters of an hour on this stage stirring up trouble in every part of this theatre.

BARNES: That's enough lip, you! Infernal nerve!

MARIE: You English have spent hundreds of years playing Empire Builders all over the world. What do you know about us at home in Europe?

ANNA: She's right. What does he know about us?

JAROSLAV: Did you hear him say he wouldn't have thought a Lithuanian could drive a truck?

MARIE: You see? Now the French.

RIDLEY: My dear girl, no one is sorrier than we are, but we really can't leave Europe to be sorted out by the French. Why, since 1940, you've hardly been a first-class power.

DUVAL: God! Since 1940—listen to him! What were you doing then? Walking into Europe, just like this theatre.

[*Crowd laugh.*]

"We'll handle this," you said. "You declare war on Germany, and we'll come and fight them on your soil."

BARNES: I like that! When your footling army—

DUVAL: —was all broken up and scattered because you retreated so quickly and let them through!

JAROSLAV: And us—the same with us. 1939. "Brave Poland," the English said. "You stand firm against the Germans, and we'll defend you."

MARIE: England defends the right—so long as the allies get all the kicks. And now, after five years of

Germans on our soil, you stroll in, and you're going to arrange everything.

PETER: You tell us how we shall live.

MILOSH: Now we're to have your democracy—whatever that is.

MARIE: I'll tell you what it is—it's like him—well-meaning, muddle-headed and smug!

DRAJA: We don't want your democracy.

JAROSLAV: He won't listen to us. He tells us we must go back, my wife and I, to Russian Poland.

RIDLEY: Can't you *see* the only thing we want is to get you settled? It's for your own good!

MARIE: Who are you to know what's good for us? *We're* the people to judge that. (*To D.P.s.*) Aren't we?

OTHERS (*ad lib*): She's right! . . . Clear out, and leave us to get on with it! . . . You leave us, and we'll manage! Get out! . . . That's right, get out!

[*They all take a step or two forward.*]

BARNES: Keep back.

RIDLEY: Get back there!

MARIE: Leave us to ourselves. Get out. We don't need you.

RIDLEY: That'll do. Get back there.

MARIE: Get out. Go home.

OTHERS (*ad lib*): She's right . . . Go on! . . . Throw them out! Rush them and run the place ourselves . . . Get behind them . . .

RIDLEY: Quiet! Or I'll fire! You're Sten. I'll watch the front. Quiet or I'll fire!

MARIE: Oh, you're armed, both of you—but there's a thousand of us. (*To the house*) Eh? What do you say? Have we had enough talk? Shall we run the place ourselves?

RIDLEY: You're covered. One move from the house, and I fire.

[Suddenly there are screams from the box that is veiled with curtain or sacking.]

WOMAN (off): No, no, no, you're lying! Come back, it isn't true!

[The woman tears the curtains aside and leans out of the box.]

Don't believe him! It is the Polish Professor. He is going to you. He says it is the *Plague!* It isn't true! He says it's the *Plague!* They'll take him from me! They'll—

[She chokes suddenly on a scream as she thinks of what may happen and goes on in a horrible whisper, staring at Ridley. The other characters move forward.]

They said he'd been a doctor, and I let him come and look at my man. He's a liar! It isn't true! They'll take him away. They'll have a gas-chamber, too. They'll burn—(screaming again) It's not . . . it's not the plague!

[She disappears behind the curtains. There is a movement of horror on the stage. Everyone except Claudia draws together in little bunches, looking at Ridley, who turns to the house.]

RIDLEY: The woman is hysterical. Keep your places. (To the people on the stage) Come on. Sit down, all of you—stay still.

[In spite of his indecision of temperament, he is able to give an order in a way that is obeyed. Now the Professor comes down from the same side as the box. He comes straight up to Ridley and talks to him aside. Everyone watches in silence, the people on the stage drawing away from him.]

PROFESSOR: I'm afraid (whispers with Ridley).

RIDLEY: What are the chances that you're wrong?

PROFESSOR: I am a Professor of Anatomy. I have not

made a diagnosis for years. But the symptoms are classical.

RIDLEY: Right. Thanks. Sergeant, are the telephones working yet?

BARNES: No, sir.

RIDLEY: Where's the nearest Army M.O.?

BARNES: There's a C.R.S. near the Town Major's office.

RIDLEY: Get round there at the double and bring him back. Tell him the set-up; he'll come. I want that man here inside five minutes.

BARNES: Sir.

[He is just going when he remembers the Pole's revolver, which he pocketed. He gives it to Ridley, who hands it to the Professor.]

RIDLEY (*to rest of house*): Now then, I'm not trying to fool you. You heard what the woman said. This man is a doctor and he thinks we have a case of bubonic plague in the house. He is a doctor, but he hasn't practised for many years, and he may be wrong. I have sent for a British Army Medical Officer. Meanwhile, you know what the Plague means. There are many hundreds of you here, enough to spread the plague, if you are infected, into every living body in Europe, into your own homes. Not a man, woman or child leaves this theatre till I give the word.

[Curtain.]

ACT TWO

[The Curtain rises to reveal the group on the stage as at the end of Act I.]

RIDLEY: Stay here. I'm going up to see what can be done for this man. I'm leaving the professor here in charge . . . Keep an eye on things, Professor.

[He singles out Duval, Jaroslav and Milosh.]

You, you and you—spread the word behind. Get the keys from Bauer and lock the doors.

[He goes off towards the box.]

[The other three, slightly dazed, go off behind.]

PETER: What does it mean? I never saw the plague.

PROFESSOR: I was a fool to tell that woman. She might have panicked you all.

PETER: We had typhus and smallpox in most of the camps, and cholera in one. But this is worse?

PROFESSOR: It has been stamped out in Europe. I may be wrong. Don't worry.

PETER: That man is a Russian. I thought you hated us.

PROFESSOR (*shocked*): I am a doctor—or I was, once.

[Bauer appears from behind, hurriedly. He looks horrified.]

BAUER: I met them. Is it true? You are the doctor? Will they burn down the theatre?

PROFESSOR: Who?

BAUER: The authorities, when they find it is the bubonic plague. Listen, Doctor, there will be no need. There was smallpox once, in the company at the Scala at Badmonsteren. A dwarf started it, and the two strong men went down in a few days. Then everyone said the theatre was going to be burned

down—a beautiful theatre, gilding and goddesses, and a revolving stage . . .

PROFESSOR: But—

BAUER: But the authorities didn't burn it, sir, I was assistant stage manager, sir, I can tell you exactly what it was that was done to disinfect the place.

PROFESSOR: Nobody is burning anything yet (*his manner of Polish D.P. talking to German is suddenly swamped by psychological interest in the case*). Aren't you afraid for yourself? You who went up in the roof there when we arrived? You can't escape from disease up a step-ladder.

BAUER (*paying no attention to this side-issue*): The theatre can be sprayed now, Doctor, with disinfectant, if that will help to save it. It is a very beautiful theatre, sir. I have plenty of disinfectant that we used after every performance.

PROFESSOR: Have you? Why didn't you produce it before?

BAUER: There was no danger to the theatre, sir. And these foreign workers always smell.

PROFESSOR: Get that spray and drench the house with it.

BAUER: Yes, sir, Herr Doctor, just as you say . . .

[*He hurries off. As he goes there is a noise, and Rebecca, clutching her baby, is propelled on to the stage by Milosh and Duval. Bauer passes them and disappears.*]

PROFESSOR: What is the matter?

DUVAL: Where is the officer?

MILOSH: She was trying to leave. The padlocks are all broken.

REBECCA: Yes, I was trying to leave. Do you think I am going to keep my child here to catch the plague?

PROFESSOR: There is no more danger for a child than for an adult. Show me . . .

[*He approaches the child, and Rebecca snatches it away.*]

REBECCA: Don't touch him! Don't come near him! (she holds the bundle close to her face, crooning over it).

PROFESSOR: You are as much danger to him as anyone else. If you left this theatre now, and you are infectious, the child would be no safer, and you might spread the disease to thousands of others—other women with children like yourself.

REBECCA: Germans. Do you mind?

PROFESSOR: Yes, even Germans. We don't make war with disease yet. And there are not only Germans in Germany now. There are the armies that freed us. Armies from our own countries.

[*She looks wildly round them, and has a sudden inspiration. She comes to the Professor.*]

REBECCA: You are a doctor, they will let you go. Take him with you. My friends will find money to pay you for everything.

PROFESSOR: Be calm, hush!

DUVAL: She will excite the others.

MILOSH: We should have locked her up somewhere.

REBECCA (*getting her breath back*): Just leave him somewhere, anywhere, outside, and tell me where . . . No—no, I may not come out alive, ever. Leave him with any Jewish people, anyone you see.

PROFESSOR: I cannot leave here any more than you can.

REBECCA: Oh, they will let you—a doctor. You can say you must get medicines, oh, you can make some excuse. He is only a few weeks old, he has done no harm. How can you refuse? Only leave him in the street with a label to say he is a Jew and someone will hear of it and care for him. No—no—forget that, he is not a Jew, he is nothing, he is hardly born.

[*She stops exhausted, and the Professor waits for the effect of the silence to tell on her.*]

PROFESSOR: Now . . . you must believe there is no special danger for the child. When the Army doctor comes, he can give him things to protect him. He is safer here, because the doctor is coming. Bauer! (*To Duval*) Call Bauer.

DUVAL (*goes to the back of the stage and calls*): Bauer! Bauer!

PROFESSOR (*to Rebecca*): We are all together in this. There are other women here with children. The child is breast-fed, isn't he? You must not excite yourself like that. Now, there is disinfectant here, a very strong disinfectant.

[*Bauer appears from behind, with a large disinfectant spray.*]

Spray this child.

[*He sniffs at the disinfectant, and sighs despairingly, but Rebecca does not notice, and holds out the bundle, pleased. Jaroslav hurries on. He has his hand to his head as if it were hurt.*]

JAROSLAV: Where is the officer? There are people trying to get out. I had a fight with two—I knocked them out.

ANNA (*delighted*): Jaroslav! You're hurt?

JAROSLAV (*putting her aside firmly*): Not now, dear, later. (*To others*) I left the man who helped me there on guard, but if there were a rush—

PETER (*shocked*): Some would go Eastwards—the Russian lines—

DUVAL: Some would go West, towards our homes.

JAROSLAV: I'll go back, but with this arm—

DUVAL: If this were to reach France, where no one has been fed for five years . . .

MILOSH: Yes! For us, if we're infected, we're in-

fected, but this is not a thing you can risk letting loose on the world.

DRAJA: We must police the doors.

PROFESSOR: Bauer! How many doors are there?

BAUER: Altogether, sir. Two front entrances, two extra exits, the stage door and the double doors into the scene dock.

PROFESSOR: Six. Six men we shall need.

[Bauer has turned away and is spraying the walls of the stalls.]

PETER: We are six here.

PROFESSOR: But . . .

[The Professor hesitates for a moment. Bauer goes all through the house during the ensuing scene, spraying as he goes.]

PETER: We know each other.

PROFESSOR: Yes, we do—a little. Take this *(he gives him Jaroslav's revolver)*.

DRAJA: We shall need more arms.

PROFESSOR: Has anyone else arms?

[Marie produces a revolver and hands it to Duval with a wry smile. The Professor turns to the audience.]

You see how we stand. Two guns and six doors. Has anyone else got arms?

DRAJA: I think I find some.

[Draja jumps down into the stalls, and from four different places near the front collects revolvers, which are concealed in pockets on the side of seats in the aisle.]

PROFESSOR: I must stay here in case the officer needs me.

JAROSLAV: We could use the man I left on guard, the man who helped me. He is Czech, I think.

MILOSH: Never mind who he is.

DRAJA (*calling*): Four enough?

PROFESSOR: That will do, we have two.

PETER: I'll go, then.

[*He goes. Draja comes back towards the stage.*]

DUVAL: I'll take the stage door. (*He calls up towards the circle*) I left my things up there. Keep an eye on them, whoever is near them. They are in the circle buffet under the counter.

[*Duval goes. Draja climbs back on to the stage. He gives two guns to Jaroslav.*]

DRAJA: And one for the man you left. Which door is it?

JAROSLAV: The extra exit, this side. I'll take the front entrance just beyond it myself.

ANNA: I will—

JAROSLAV: No, Anna, don't come. You stay here.

[*He goes. Anna looks pleased and admiring. Draja gives one of the remaining revolvers to Milosh.*]

DRAJA: That leaves the other extra exit for me and the other front entrance for you.

MILOSH: Sing out if you want help.

[*They both go off, on the opposite side to Jaroslav.*]

ANNA: Jaroslav is quite different when he has something to do.

PROFESSOR: He likes to fight.

ANNA: Men do.

MARIE: Even Duval! In the resistance our best fighters were the most unlikely people. There was a sanatorium where the patients used to go out at night and sabotage the railway line.

[*The woman from the Box slips on to the stage. She is in a highly hysterical state.*]

WOMAN (*to Marie*): Candles?

MARIE: What?

WOMAN: Candles, I want to get some candles. The electric lights have no bulbs. I stole one but the switch does not work. I must have candles.

MARIE: What do you need them for? There are windows everywhere.

WOMAN: There isn't any window and my husband is ill. I have just two I brought with me that are nearly burned out. I shall need a great many, soon.

MARIE: The German stage-manager may have one or two . . . Professor, could you get Bauer, do you think? There's a woman here who has no light in the room she's in, and he may have some candles. Her husband's ill.

[The Professor comes down, having followed Milosh and Draja half off, looking into the wings in an inspectorial way. He has not recognised the woman nor she him, but now she draws behind Marie, trying to get out of his eyeline.]

PROFESSOR: Yes, of course. (*Calling*) Bauer! Bauer! Candles. Candles, do you hear, as many as you can find. (*Recognising Woman*) You! I told you to stay there. What do you mean by coming out? Get back! What is that idiot of a young officer thinking of to let you down here?

WOMAN (*with the courage of terror*): I need candles. I must have them. You're wrong about my husband, and there is another doctor coming who must see him properly. My candles are almost burned out and they won't let me raise the curtain (*to Marie*) they say the people—

MARIE (*softly*): The Curtain? (*she looks up at the Box*) You're the woman from the Box.

[Slowly, horror-stricken, she draws back from her. Anna clutches at her and draws back too.]

REBECCA: The plague! The woman with the plague!

[*She stifles, wraps across the baby's face and draws a corner of her shawl across her own mouth, backing slowly. Marie and Anna cover their noses and mouths too.*]

[*Everything seems to have got into slow-motion as the women continue to back while staring, fascinated; until Rebecca breaks the spell and turns and bolts. The Professor catches her, intercepting her plunge, and gripping her. She can't struggle much lest she drop the baby.*]

PROFESSOR: Stop that. I know' you, run screaming through the whole building and start a stampede. Now, now—the stairs and corridors are dark, you plunge like that and you'll trip and drop the child. Be careful, he's slipping. There, now . . . Stay here, it's no worse, stay here.

[*He keeps a grip on her though she relaxes.*]

REBECCA (*relaxing, desperate*): It's everywhere. Yes, it's no better, while the doors are guarded . . . It's in the air, all the air, poisoned.

[*She draws the shawl closer over the baby. The Professor still grips her arm. The other two women are now at a considerable distance and stop.*]

MARIE (*to Woman, harshly*): Get off, get back there.

WOMAN: No. No! I know what they'll do, some other doctor they've sent for, he'll take another quick look and say "Plague—burn the body at once." Burn him. I've seen them do it when it was cholera in the camp.

PROFESSOR (*authoritatively*): He's not dead, there's no question of burning bodies, get back up to that—

WOMAN: No, he's not dead. When did that ever matter to them? You've got a number branded on your wrist, I saw it, up there (*indicating box*)—you've been in the camps like the rest of us, you know how much they care if men are dead first.

MARIE: The camps have been liberated, you're in Allied hands, now get back, go back up there.

WOMAN: Allied hands—look how they help me! I want candles, if I'm not to raise that curtain; let him see at least what he is calling the Plague, the new Doctor when he comes, mine are nearly burned out.

ANNA: We'll send you up candles. Go back, do you want to breathe what's killing your husband over other women's men?

[Bauer, with an air of self-satisfied efficiency, appears pushing ahead of him a mammoth candlestick with a colossal painted candle in it—the Paschal Candle out of some religious production. He has a lighted taper between his teeth, and when the candle is in position by Ridley's desk he stands on tiptoe and lights it.]

BAUER (*beaming*): I always thought it a pity we only had the chance to use it in one production.

WOMAN (*beginning to laugh*): Corpse candles—and he isn't dead yet. What did I tell you?

PROFESSOR (*leaving Rebecca*): You idiot—candles, I said, not . . . What did you think I could do with this?

BAUER: You didn't say, Herr Professor. They've stolen all the others. It has great dignity, and it is pure wax from the best firm of ecclesiastical suppliers—it will burn for—

[Marie takes from hiding somewhere on her person a large electric torch. She holds it out and takes a step forward but then weakens and hands it to the Professor.]

MARIE: Oh, for God's sake give her this and get her to go.

[The Professor jerks his head to Bauer who goes, shrugging, leaving the candle burning. He takes the torch and tries it, showing a powerful beam.] .

PROFESSOR: There, that'll be better than a dozen candles. Now go back, the British officer is still with your husband; but if you leave that box again till he gives you word, I'll see to it that he has you put in some room where you can be locked up.

[He gives the woman the torch and she hurries off with it, after hesitating for one moment whether to thank Marie but only looking at her with venom, and giving one last half-hysterical sob as she goes. The other women relax.]

PROFESSOR: Thank you. I'm afraid you valued the torch.

MARIE: I stole it from the body of a dead warder when my prison was relieved. It's been useful.

PROFESSOR: I'm sorry. We all get insanely possessive about the oddments that we can still call our own.

MARIE: No. It isn't that. It's that—I couldn't go near her.

PROFESSOR: Oh well—

ANNA: Nobody should. You haven't only yourself to think of.

MARIE: No. I couldn't help her—touch her—I couldn't even breathe the air she breathed. Experience doesn't teach us much, after all, Professor.

PROFESSOR: What do you mean?

MARIE: All the work we did in the Resistance, you know—it was difficult, dangerous, exciting, terrible, all the things I didn't really mind. I should have thought that by now I should have had the courage to do what I could not do then—be a nurse.

PROFESSOR: A nurse? You?

MARIE: You see what a bad one you think I should make. I don't mean a professional nurse. I mean at the beginning of the War, there was only one thing a Woman with any courage knew she ought to do; be a nurse. I couldn't. I couldn't face it: filth, and pain, and even the boredom and the stupidity of

the other nurses. I'm sorry, I'm talking too much. I was just surprised to find *I* was still terrified of disease.

[*Ridley comes on from the direction of the box and speaks quietly but audibly to the Professor.*]

RIDLEY: I know nothing about it, but whatever he's got, he's got it badly. I've arranged for water and more blankets to be taken up. Where are the men?

PROFESSOR: Guarding the doors. The padlocks have been broken—

RIDLEY: And those lads of ours got together? International Police Force, eh?

PROFESSOR: We—er—found some extra arms for them.

RIDLEY: The devil you did! We—ell, now. (*He looks thoughtfully at the audience*) Voluntary disarmament!

PROFESSOR: There is a social conscience even among foreigners, Captain.

RIDLEY: Your hole, Professor.

[*Marie, after a glance when Ridley first comes on, from which she learns that there is nothing new, has been talking eagerly in an undertone to Anna. Now they come forward.*]

MARIE: This waiting till your doctor comes, and having nothing to do is bad.

RIDLEY: It isn't a picnic for any of us.

MARIE: You don't understand. We want to help. This woman worrying about her baby—(*indicating Rebecca*) is unsettling for the others. They should all have something to do. We will get her to help us to arrange a room behind where we can keep all the young children.

RIDLEY: Good, girl. But two rooms—one for East and one for West, for heaven's sake.

MARIE: We will be responsible.

ANNA: There are two big dressing rooms, each with water running. I will take the Eastbound. There will be some who don't understand German.

MARIE: Good. When she has finished helping me, I'll pass her on to you. (*To Rebecca*) Madame, we have an idea for the children. If they were all together we could arrange to feed them, to warm things and wash things, and keep them quiet, away from all this bustle here.

REBECCA: Where? Still inside here?

MARIE: Yes, but behind. They would be better away from the lights and the noise.

REBECCA: It would be better, yes. If they must stay, it would be better.

MARIE: Will you help to prepare the place?

REBECCA: I?

MARIE: Then your child can come too.

REBECCA: Yes, I'll help you. But I must take him with me.

[*They help her to her feet and go off, talking as they go.*]

ANNA: I have an idea. Those great wicker baskets in the dressing rooms, they would make fine cradles.

MARIE: Good, yes!

ANNA: Two of the smallest babies at each end; and we could make up beds.

PROFESSOR: A first child, born late in life . . . Mother love can be a terrible disease.

RIDLEY: I suppose a baby's scream is the nearest we'll ever get to Esperanto.

[*Milosh appears with a note for Ridley.*]

RIDLEY: Lord, now what?

MILOSH: A British soldier with two stripes on his arm brought it. He couldn't speak German, but he seemed to have orders not to come in.

RIDLEY (*reading*): "Sir the M.O. has gone sick"—bless his heart—"Am going after another. Bearer is a Corporal R.A.M.C." (*To Milosh*) My compliments to the Corporal. (*He writes*) I'm telling him in English to relieve your men and post his own outside with the doors closed.

MILOSH: Good. Yes.

RIDLEY: Thanks.

[*Milosh goes.*]

If we have to keep the place sealed overnight, I'll send to the Town Major to get a levy of food, but for the moment we've got to sort out what food we have already.

[*Anna appears at a door in the circle.*]

PROFESSOR: Captain, I wish to God I had practised my profession instead of preaching it. I can do nothing for that man, and I can only keep you all in suspense.

RIDLEY: There's nothing anyone can do for him.

PROFESSOR: One used to be rather conceited about one's University status above the ordinary practitioner. I'm afraid a friend of mine was right when he said the object of a University was to prepare its students for life and its Professors for death!

RIDLEY: Dying is an accomplishment. Some of your colleagues have shown us that superbly in the last few years.

PROFESSOR: The lucky ones. Those that have suddenly been called on to live have found it terrible. I did not even keep up an artificial relation with the outside world. We had them, the young ones usually—but some old fools too—who used to attend International conferences here and World Councils there, tiresome folk who were always writing to protest about something or other.

RIDLEY: I remember the type.

PROFESSOR: I expect they have found it easier. I—I used to love to know that on each day I was doing what the occupant of my chair at the University had been doing on every day of the week since the thirteenth century.

RIDLEY: Well, that was what your students came for.

PROFESSOR: Oh my students! (*Proudly*) They had a caricature of me—an alchemist's costume dictating a list of spells! The Medical schools of my University were famous for Black Magic in the Middle Ages . . . But my lecture rooms were always full.

RIDLEY: They will be again.

PROFESSOR: Perhaps.

RIDLEY: Besides, when I came down just now you had the situation in this madhouse as well under control as I've seen it yet!

PROFESSOR: Now you are being kind to me. You are a young man to have to play Godfather to us all.

[*On to the stage from the directions in which they left come the male D.Ps.:*]

RIDLEY (*gets up*): Army's taken over, Gentlemen, I'm very grateful. Thank you. Thank you . . .

[*Jaroslav lays his revolver casually on Ridley's table. The others with equal lack of ostentation, follow suit.*]

Thank you. And now can you help me again?—over this question of food? Bauer! What's become of that stage manager fellow? Bauer!

JAROSLAV (*to Claudia*): Where is my wife? Anna, Anna, the Polish girl—where did she go?

[*She looks at him blankly and shakes her head.*]

RIDLEY: Bauer!

PROFESSOR: I had him disinfect the house (*Quietly*)—for psychological effect!

[Bauer hurries on, still with his spray. He sprays a D.P. in his path, and goes to the Professor, who has his back to him, and with perfect seriousness sprays him zealously.]

BAUER: The disinfectant, Professor.

RIDLEY (*laughing*): You can't have a psychological effect on a doctor. Have you cleared that paint store for the food?

BAUER: Oh yes, sir, yes, some time ago.

RIDLEY: Right. Stand by. Now—

DUVAL: Yes, there should be a group appointed to collect the food, and a committee to arrange the fair distribution. There should be an official on each floor of the theatre.

RIDLEY: And a chain of interlocking sub-committees on the stairs. Sorry, Duval. You're quite right; but we'll have as few officials as we possibly can.

DUVAL: To have officials is the natural way to organise things.

RIDLEY: Let's start from the food. Can you men do the collecting?

[They look at each other as though remembering that this was the cause of the earlier quarrel. Ridley is aware this is the test.]

MILOSH: We, the Communists here, will take charge.

RIDLEY: Listen. Everything we've got must be pooled and share equally.

[There is a pause.]

A man weak with hunger will more easily succumb to a disease. Whatever this infection is, the less there is of it the better for all our sakes. Aren't I right?

[Milosh catches Peter's eye. Peter nods. After another

moment's pause, Milosh pulls forward the disputed sack of bread into the middle of the stage. Ridley swing round on the audience.

PROFESSOR: He's right. You risk your own life now if you let your neighbour starve.

RIDLEY (*to the audience*): These men will collect every scrap of food in the house, and a committee from among you will see that it is equally divided between you.

[*He turns to the men on the stage. They are deciding quickly among themselves where each is to go. He shouts after them as they go.*]

And count heads as you collect, and Bauer—

[*Bauer comes back. The Professor, who is by him, lingers.*]

Have you any cloakroom tickets?

BAUER: I have never had anything to do with the front of the house. Never anything whatsoever.

RIDLEY: Are there any cloak-room tickets?

BAUER: Yes, sir, no doubt, sir; I'll see if there are any in the office.

RIDLEY: Get them for the Professor here.

PROFESSOR: As Coupons?

RIDLEY: That's right. One each.

[*Bauer goes off.*]

Now this committee. One from each nationality or one from each party—

PROFESSOR: There are four men everyone in the house will trust.

RIDLEY: Didn't know we had any archangels.

PROFESSOR: The four men who gave their revolvers to your international police force. •

RIDLEY: You're right. (*To audience*) Did you hear that? We're appointing the four men who gave

up their arms for the general defence to see that the food is equally divided. You four, then, whoever you are, get round behind to the food-store—the paint shop, and make your arrangements.

PROFESSOR: I'll see to those tickets.

[He goes, passing Anna and Marie who come on rolling their sleeves down, talking as they come.]

ANNA: She is very efficient, and that tongue of hers ought to keep even the mothers in order!

[They laugh.]

MARIE (*to Ridley*): We have left the Polish Jewish woman in charge of both rooms. She is terribly effective. We aren't needed any more. Once we had everything arranged for them, the mothers despised us because we are childless.

ANNA (*to Claudia*): Where is my husband? Still guarding his door?

CLAUDIA: Um? . . . I'm sorry.

RIDLEY: He is helping to collect the food.

MARIE: The food—Anna, that stove! (*To Ridley*) 'There is an electric stove in a room up there. The caretaker's flat perhaps.

ANNA: Oh, good, we can make soup anyhow.

[Marie nudges her and indicates Claudia.]

MARIE (*to Claudia*): Madame, we are going to organise a place to heat food, a place to make soup. Will you help us?

[Claudia looks at her blankly.]

Wouldn't you like to have something to do? It helps, it helps one's mind, to have something to do with one's hands.

CLAUDIA (*after looking at them blankly but recognising kindness in the tone*): Nothing, thank you.

ANNA: What does she mean?

MARIE: Hush! The men must fetch and carry. It is up a mountain of stairs. The room will hold five women, working.

ANNA: Four.

MARIE: Four. Here is one good cook. We need three more. Come on, you women without children! Are the mothers right, are we no use in the world? Anna, go and rout them out. Of course they can cook!

ANNA: Of course they can! We can get a recipe from every country in Europe if we like.

[Anna laughs and goes off.]

RIDLEY: Magnificent! But can't you cook?

MARIE: I? God help you if I tried! I am a—I was—a pianist.

[There is a noise of voices off, and Barnes appears conducting a Captain R.A.M.C., middle-aged and exuding reliability.]

BARNES: Captain Saunders, sir.

RIDLEY: Thank God for you, old man. Did the Sergeant put you in the picture?

SAUNDERS: He put me in a jeep, old boy. He kidnapped me. Yes, he told me. Nasty, if true. Possible, unfortunately, quite possible. You were right to seal the place up.

[The Professor comes on, looking about, as though he had heard of the arrival of Saunders.]

RIDLEY: This is the Polish Professor of Medicine who saw the case. Captain Saunders.

SAUNDERS: How do you do?

PROFESSOR: I am not a practising Physician. I hope I am wrong.

SAUNDERS: But you doubt it. That's the way a practising physician feels all the time. Come away to the patient. We'll soon find out.

RIDLEY: Go with them, Barnes. I won't get in your way.

[*Barnes leads the Professor and Saunders off in the direction of the box. They are talking as they go.*]

PROFESSOR: There is a bad swelling of the lymphatic gland in the groin, and considerable subcutaneous hæmorrhage, but there appears to be no . . .

[*They disappear.*]

[*Marie and Ridley stand looking after them in silence.*]

MARIE: . . . It is the same plague as they used to call the Black Death in the Middle Ages, isn't it?

RIDLEY: Yes . . .

MARIE: Is there anything else one can do?

RIDLEY (*his mind not on it*): Is there a bath in the caretaker's quarters? You might work out a rota . . .

[*They both laugh.*]

Idiotic ideas come out of one's sub-conscious at a time like this.

MARIE: Oh, not so idiotic. It is a filthy disease—a natural train of thought. It is a long time since I had a good bath. Do you know what I used to think of in prison?—I was not in a concentration camp, you know, I was in a German women's prison. It was an evil place. We were fed and clothed, but I would rather have been in a concentration camp. Do you know what I used to think? (*she speaks fervently, not with gentle reminiscence*) I used to think of a bathroom with walls of sea-green frosted glass, and a floor of sea-green tiles. There was a pure white mat, pure white (*with intense seriousness*)—I will not have any borders of colours; and a white wooden stool, not

steel, white wood, with a bath-towel on it, so big it might be a tent, and so soft it might be a cloud. Sometimes I would have bottles and jars of essences, camellia, and sandalwood and fern; but usually nothing but a great ball of soap. No one has ever made soap that smelt like that. It smelt like the sea the first day you arrive, like the Luxembourg gardens in May at five o'clock in the morning. Like your first evening dress when you took it out of its box. Then there was the bath—I—I can't describe the bath—'

[She bursts into tears. Ridley half moves towards her, then stops.]

RIDLEY: It doesn't sound like the caretaker's bathroom to me. You'll have to wait till you get to Paris.

MARIE (*half laughing*): I'm sorry. It's—everything being so different from what you mean it to be, and the way you try to make it. Dirt and vice and poverty everywhere, and now disease. I loathe disease.

RIDLEY: Yes, I'd have said I did.

MARIE: But—

RIDLEY: I don't know. At least for the last half-hour we've stopped talking of our high moral principles.

MARIE: You think all our beliefs are wrong.

RIDLEY: I believe I think that belief itself is wrong. There's logic for you! But theories are harmless, a theory is a thing you can hold lightly, you can balance it, hold it up to the light and look at it, compare it with your neighbour's. Belief is dangerous, it is the arm flung out in salute, the clenched fist you use to knock your neighbour down if he doesn't believe the same. I was taught that the Wars of Religion were the worst and the most unjustifiable form of war.

MARIE: Well, so they were. Religious persecution, heresy hunting—

RIDLEY: But isn't that just what we are heading for again? Only the religions have changed. "You believe what I believe, or you're evil and must perish." What else are they saying in Spain, in Greece—what else were you saying, here in this theatre?

MARIE: Well . . . Open the doors, let the Plague loose over Europe, frighten the world as we're frightened here.

RIDLEY: Shall I?

MARIE: Have you so much *belief* in your theory?

[*Down the stalls comes Milosh, with a trolley loaded with bread, big continental loaves, whole and in pieces.*]

MILOSH: Any more bread? This is the last load, any more?

[*He wheels it up to the stage and Barnes comes down to take the bread as Milosh hands it up.*]

I think this is the quickest way through, really. If you'll stack it up there I'll come up and take it through. Jaroslav, the Pole, is checking stores and counting heads. He's got all the figures for you.

RIDLEY: How are the distribution committee doing?

MILOSH: Fine.

RIDLEY: No trouble?

MILOSH: There can't be. No one is allowed to make a speech.

RIDLEY: When I'm demobbed, I'm going to write a thesis on the Hoftheatre Theory of International Relations.

BARNES: *If you're demobbed, sir. (glancing up at the box.)*

MILOSH: Collecting the food is a distraction. They watch that.

BARNES: I'd never have thought it.

RIDLEY: Oh, they rob the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker as they go.

BARNES: I didn't mean how much they've collected, sir—I meant that they've collected any at all.

[*Enter Peter with padlocks and keys.*]

PETER: Where's Jiri?

RIDLEY: Who?

PETER: The Czech who is clever with his hands. The man from Lidice.

RIDLEY: I'd forgotten him. His stuff's all here.

[*Peter discovers Jiri asleep in scenery and bundles him out.*]

PETER (*to Ridley*): He sleeps till he is told he is free again. (*To Jiri*) You can help. You might as well help as sleep. We need padlocks for the food stores. Can you mend these? You are clever . . .

JIRI: Clever. (*beams*). Yes.

PETER: And when we leave, you come with me. We will find you a place—a useful place . . .

[*Peter nods to Ridley, who gives him a grateful "thumbs up" sign. Peter goes off L.*]

[*Marie comes on from P. side D.L.*]

[*Duval appears from behind.*]

DUVAL: Is there no news yet? The people behind are asking.

RIDLEY: We expect it any moment now.

DUVAL: There is anxiety. It is worrying—the doctor is so slow.

RIDLEY: It is a good sign he should have taken so long. At least it can't have been a very obvious case. Barnes, take a look behind—look confident—you know, normal.

BARNES: Sort of, "any complaints," sir?

RIDLEY: For God's sake don't put any ideas into their heads.

[Jaroslav comes on with a sheaf of papers, which he gives to Ridley, who takes them to his table.]

JAROSLAV: Here are the figures. I think they're quite complete. This column shows you . . .

[Jaroslav, Barnes and Ridley bend over the table and talk in undertones as Jaroslav goes through the papers. Duval has picked up a piece of bread and is examining it.]

DUVAL (*to Marie*): Not so good as ours at home. They never get a crust like ours.

MARIE (*reminiscently*): Ha . . . a bagette, still warm! (*urgently*) Not a roll or a croissant—a bagette!

DUVAL: With a slit in its side—not cut open so that it gets cold, just slit, and the butter tucked in—

MARIE: Good Normandy butter!

DUVAL: *My* butter, perhaps—nearly all mine went to Paris.

MARIE: And a bowl of coffee with it, on the pavement in the sunshine outside the cafe on the corner, on the way to work—

DUVAL: Better still in my kitchen, when I'd come in again after seeing to the milking, with the fire burning up well, and the radio on, and half an hour to spare.

[Jaroslav has left Ridley and Barnes—who have sat down to the lists—and joined Duval and Marie.]

JAROSLAV: Had you many cows?

DUVAL: Eighteen Friesians, twelve Normany short-horns—they were the best milkers—and sixteen cross-breeds. Had you cows?

JAROSLAV: Over two hundred.

DUVAL: }
MARIE: } What?

JAROSLAV: I was *head* cowman. Many thousand acres, one of the biggest estates in Eastern Poland—mostly under grain, of course. I can tell you though, with all the cows we had, we had among them the *murain* . . .

DUVAL: I can imagine it. I've seen a herd die off like the Pla— (*he stops, suddenly remembering their situation, and glancing up at the box*) . . . It's what they call Bubonic Plague, isn't it? It's carried by rats. I am not surprised. There is enough corruption in Europe to feed armies of them.

RIDLEY: That'll do.

DUVAL (*who is almost enjoying frightening himself*): They will eat anything, rats, and go anywhere. In a big place like this there are bound to be rats, and now with crumbs of food about they will come out, with these infections on them, on their filthy feet—

MARIE: Ah—don't—

RIDLEY: Be quiet! Damn you!

[*Barnes comes on and speaks quietly to Ridley.*]

RIDLEY: Any news?

BARNES: Left the M.O. to it, sir. Not much elbow room in there for anything out of the ordinary. Nasty sight, sir, We're going to have to do something, sir, or we shall have trouble on our hands.

RIDLEY: Trouble?

BARNES: They're scared, sir.

RIDLEY: Oh, that.

BARNES: I don't like the look of things. I'm not saying they aren't behaving damned well, but this strain—not being sure—isn't good. It won't hold up, sir.

RIDLEY: It's no use hustling the M.O. We've got to let him take his time.

BARNES: Hysterics is the way it'll break.

RIDLEY: What? They seem dead still to me.

BARNES: That's it. That's the way it is before it breaks.

MARIE: I think he's right. It is one thing to see disease in a prison camp when you have no hope. It is another to meet it now—on the way to freedom and home.

BARNES: Everything's been hung up, like, for six years, frozen. Things are dangerous when they're thawing out. I'd have felt easier in my mind if we'd had a panic stampede in the first two minutes. I don't like it. We've got to do something to take their minds off it.

RIDLEY: Heavens, man, what? Tell each other funny stories?

BARNES: Listen—

MARIE: A woman sobbing.

RIDLEY: No, where?

[During the last few moments Bauer has come back on to the stage according to instructions, and has been standing about in the background. Now he approaches.]

BAUER: A show, sir, you should put on a show, here, on the stage. It is a magnificent stage, very well equipped. The acoustics . . .

RIDLEY: Yes, Yes, you said all that, but . . .

BARNES: By God, though, he's on to something, sir!

RIDLEY *(slowly to Marie)*: Can you sing or dance?

MARIE: Even less than I can cook.

RIDLEY: But you can play?

MARIE: I don't think a piano sonata is what you need just now.

RIDLEY: Perhaps not.

BARNES *(to audience)*: Betty Grable more like. Can anybody sing or dance, or play anything? Any-

thing at all?—Come on, we want to cheer ourselves up. Is there an actress in the house?

CLAUDIA (*quickly*): An actress?

[*She looks up from her corner for the first time of her own volition, as though a sound had awakened her and she can't remember what it was. The others look at each other, startled.*]

RIDLEY: Are you an actress?

CLAUDIA: I? (*bewildered*) Of course. I am an opera singer. You know me.

MARIE: What can you do?

CLAUDIA (*slipping back*): Do? Oh . . . nothing.

MARIE (*goes quickly to Claudia*): Quick, you have got to sing. You have to go on now. Everyone is waiting. There is no time to think, you must hurry, hurry! The curtain has to go up in a moment. What is your part? Quick—what is your part?

BAUER: Violetta?

CLAUDIA: Is it Violetta?

[*Marie looks round enquiringly, and Bauer nods eagerly.*]

BAUER: Violetta, yes, Verdi's Traviata. (*To Ridley*) We have the score. I'll find a costume, we have make-up, we have—

CLAUDIA: I have everything, of course—(*getting up*) make-up, and jewellery . . .

[*She opens the dressing case she has clutched throughout, and looks in it. Her hand falls to her side with the case in it, the lid hanging open. The case is completely empty.*]

MARIE: But that's nothing. It was stupid of your dresser, but it doesn't matter. They have everything here. We must hurry.

CLAUDIA: Yes, they are there, surely, they are already in front.

MARIE: Yes, but come quickly. There is just time.

RIDLEY: Bauer, can you dress the stage up a bit?

BAUER: Our finest sets are in the store, but I will do my best. A backcloth perhaps and some pillars—and steps, yes, steps for the entrance of the great singer.

RIDLEY: Anything, anything for them to look at. Get any help you want from the D.Ps. Go with him, you two. (*To Duval and Jaroslav*).

BAUER: We shall want four strong men in the fly galleries. If you will pick them, I will tell them what to do.

[*Marie and Bauer hurry Claudia off, she still clutching her case, still half awake in her nightmare. Marie looks back over her shoulder with a "last hope" shrug.*]

RIDLEY: We could send that singer off on a convoy to the moon. She'd hardly notice. She won't hinder and she won't help. She might as well be dead.

BARNES: Nice looking.

RIDLEY: Well, we'll feed her up for your sake then. Do you know this opera that she's going to sing from?

BARNES: No, sir. 'Fraid I'm not much of a fan for opera and poetry even in peace time.

RIDLEY: Nor me, I find, in war time, Shakespeare and Co. are a bit on the boisterous side. You've got all the big guns and alarums and excursions that you need. You don't want a Royal Throne of Kings, a Sceptred Isle, and Earth of Majesty, or a Seat of Mars. You want little sentiments from Christmas cards with robins on them, but when I was in North Africa, there was one poem I kept remembering. It's about the Cotswolds—

- . The tender Evenlode, that makes
Her meadows hush to hear the sound
Of waters mingling in the brakes,
And binds my heart to English ground.

BARNES: I never can see that it makes anything any clearer to have it rhyme. All I want now is to get out of this stinking pest-house and back to Tyne-side and plain prose . . .

MARIE: The singer won't let me help. She said I wasn't her dresser and if her dresser was ill she'd sooner manage herself. I think she's going to be alright.

RIDLEY: Bauer, you said you had the score for this aria that the woman's going to sing.

BAUER: Yes, yes, sir. On the piano over there.

RIDLEY (*to Marie*): You said you were a pianist. Go and try it over.

[*Marie climbs down into the Orchestra Pit and disappears at the back of it.*]

RIDLEY (*to Bauer*): Now then—set the stage.

BAUER (*delighted*): Set the stage?

[*A piece of scenery begins to come down from the flies. At the same time, another piece is slid on from the wings. It is flamboyant, exotic, in brilliant contrast to the drab, bare stage, the sort of thing that might have been used in an impressionist production. Meanwhile from the orchestra pit comes the sound of the aria being tried over on the piano. Ridley turns out the practical light on his desk and he and Barnes pull one of the screens across to mask the desk itself. Duval and Jaroslav come on, carrying between them some great roll of brightly-coloured velvet drapes. They stand rather vaguely in the middle of the stage, looking about them. Bauer bustles on, in his element.*]

BAUER: No, no! Over there! Can't you see? Hurry! Like this—

[Under his direction, they fling the material so that it hangs in splendid folds across a corner. Bauer spots something off stage.]

(To Ridley) She's coming.

[The piano playing stops.]

BAUER: Wait! The lights!

[Bauer hurries off, Duval and Jaroslav backing off after him, admiring the effect they have achieved. Milosh and Draja are climbing up on to the stage by the bridge over the orchestra pit, when the lights begin to be focused on the set Bauer has devised. Draja signs down into the pit, and the piano starts again as Claudia appears. Draja and Milosh settle down on the bridge. Claudia is richly dressed for the part. She still clutches in one hand the empty dressing case, with the lid propped open against the folds of her dress. Ridley draws back to the side: he and Barnes remain just in sight. Claudia begins to sing, fumbling at first, still in her nightmare. Gradually, excitingly, she finds her voice again. At one moment she seems to wake, to realise who and where she is, and, terrified, she halts again. Then the case slips from her fingers and she is mistress of herself: she is the great singer, filling the theatre, coming majestically down and singing gloriously.

As she finishes singing—THE CURTAIN FALLS.

There is time only for the D.Ps, to applaud the singer before we hear voices behind.

Marie begins to climb up onto the Stage from the Orchestra Pit. THE CURTAIN RISES.

Claudia is standing where she has finished her singing, her hands over her face.

Ridley lets out a long sigh of appreciation, staring at her, and relaxes. Barnes comes forward and looks critically over the audience, listening.]

BARNES: Did the trick all right. Broken the tension. Smells O.K. now.

RIDLEY (*angrily*): Trick? That was a miracle.

[*Marie has climbed up onto the stage. She goes quickly towards Claudia, anxiously. Ridley catches her by the arm as she passes.*]

MARIE: Who can she have been?

RIDLEY: She seemed to take it for granted we knew her—even if she'd forgotten herself.

MARIE: Not *her*—her voice. Even she hadn't forgotten that.

RIDLEY: It makes one wonder what else may not be lost in this ant-heap. (*To Barnes*). And you're right, you soulless Philistine, it's done the trick. They're different people.

[*Bauer comes on, rubbing his hands and beaming.*]

BAUER: The acoustics are good, aren't they?

RIDLEY: Acoustics! My God, acoustics!

BAUER: Yes, it's a question of the height of the dome in relation to the concavity—and the cubic space, you see, is—

RIDLEY: Get out! Beat it! Get off this stage! Get rid of some of this nonsense! I feel as if I'm shouting in church.

[*Bauer backs off rapidly.*]

BARNES: He's not such a bad little skite. Man with one idea: his job. And the officer will want his table again.

[*Draja and Milosh continue the stacking of food that was interrupted by the singing, but as they do so they are interrupted by the sound of sobbing from the box. Barnes and Ridley are re-creating their "office" with Marie's help. They all stop, frozen.*]

RIDLEY: Well, back to normal.

MARIE: Listen! . . . I'd half forgotten.

[*She can see into the wings, and suddenly backs away.*]

[*Voices off. Saunders: "Wait a minute. I must speak to the Officer in charge . . ."*]

The Doctor! No! . . . Oh, Mother of God, no!

[*Saunders comes on from the direction of the Box.*]

SAUNDERS: It's O.K.

[*Everyone relaxes in a long sigh, Marie quite unconsciously makes the sign of the cross.*]

The man is dead, but it wasn't the plague.

RIDLEY: Thank God. (*Calling into the wings*) Duval! (*to audience*) Did you hear? Did you hear that?

[*Duval appears. Ridley indicates backstage.*]

Let them know behind. (*To audience*) It's all right. It wasn't the plague.

[*As Duval goes off behind. Voices off: "It's not the plague, it's all right, etc." Barnes blows his nose vigorously.*]

SAUNDERS (*to Ridley*): Amazingly similar. I took a hell of a time making sure.

[*Ridley exchanges a look with Barnes.*]

RIDLEY: So we noticed.

SAUNDERS: Well, I'm not used to making my diagnosis to music. At a glance, I'd have agreed with your Professor. I've left him up there, incidentally, tidying up. An appalling case of blood-poisoning, with the complication of near-starvation. The infection had started in the foot, which explained the swelling of the lymphatic gland in the groin that frightened us. You see, with the man in that condition the fever had everything to help it. Of

course the discoloration from hæmorrhage was alarming, but—

RIDLEY: Put it in one word.

SAUNDERS: Well, all you need know is that death was from tetanus and that you have nothing to worry about.

RIDLEY: No mistake?

SAUNDERS: Guaranteed.

RIDLEY: Well, *we've* solved the problems of Europe, with the aid of your bogey.

SAUNDERS: There should be a lot of money in that! are you copyrighting the solution?

RIDLEY (*airily*): No, no. I can live on my pay.

[*During this interchange, Milosh and Draja are hauling up onto the stage the bundles they left on the floor of the stalls.*

Draja shoulders the lot and goes off with them.]

SAUNDERS: Well, I must get.

RIDLEY: Oh, must you?—It was awfully good of you to come . . .

[*He holds out his hand automatically. Saunders, mildly surprised, takes it. Then Ridley hears himself and laughs rather weakly.*]

God, listen to me, I sound like the Vicar's wife after the dinner party.

[*Saunders laughs, and goes, calling over his shoulder.*]

SAUNDERS: So long.

RIDLEY (*calling after him*): Ask the Town Major for a German burial party, will you? I've got a lot of dead backstage.

SAUNDERS (*off*): O.K.

RIDLEY (*to Barnes*): If we leave them about much longer we really shall start something . . . Whew! Well, get the doors unlocked, Sergeant, and dismiss the guards.

BARNES (*doubting the wisdom of this*): Very good, sir.

[*Barnes goes off.*]

MARIE: What about the woman?

RIDLEY: What woman?

MARIE: The wife of the Russian. He's dead, isn't he?

RIDLEY (*after a moment's pause*): Can you wait—just two or three days—before you move westwards?

MARIE: Shall you wait help here?

RIDLEY: Yes.

[*They look at each other for a moment in silence.*]

MARIE: I'll stay.

RIDLEY: Thank you . . . Yes. Go to the woman.

[*The Professor comes on from the direction of the Box, with Jaroslav. They are carrying between them a stretcher made of a gay little gilded screen, on which lies the body of the dead Russian. Over the face has been thrown a flaring crimson cloak with gold embroidery. The rest of the body is covered with a ragged old black overcoat. Marie, turning from Ridley to go to the box, runs against the stretcher, and leaps back with a shuddering cry, clutching at Ridley.*]

All right, all right. It wasn't the plague, you know.

[*The Professor and Jaroslav put the stretcher down.*]

MARIE (*recovering*): Yes . . . of course . . . I know. (*She turns on the Professor in a natural reaction from the strain of waiting and the sudden shock. She is still shaking*). No thanks to you, though, with your blundering guesswork. It's not your fault that you didn't start a panic stampede.

ANNA: What is it? The Frenchman said it was all right.

PROFESSOR (*stiffly*): My diagnosis was perfectly honest. It was merely wrong.

MARIE: Merely! He freezes a theatre-full of people with a paralysing terror, and calls it "merely wrong" !

DUVAL (*to Jaroslav, scared*): Trouble—she's started making trouble again. Has she said anything about me ?

JAROSLAV: Sh!

[*They whisper.*]

[*Peter and Draja have approached Milosh at the same time. All this interchange is very hurried and low.*]

MILOSH: The Poles again and the collaborator. Listen.

PROFESSOR (*to Jaroslav, indicating body*): Give me a hand again, we'll take it—

MARIE: No, wait . . . I wonder if your guess was "merely wrong." Eh ? You turned a nasty moment, didn't you, when you suddenly went off and discovered plague in the house. A nasty moment for you—remember ? (*she turns to the others on the stage*). Remember ? Do you remember when it was that he suddenly went off and discovered his black bubonic plague to terrify us with ?

RIDLEY (*realising what this may lead to*): For Heaven's sake—don't be a little fool—

PETER: I remember—we were just saying . . .

PROFESSOR (*angry, but almost amused*): You dare to say that I deliberately made a false diagnosis to frighten you ?

[*The others look at each other. Peter moves towards the Professor. Duval automatically puts a hand on his arm to restrain him but withdraws it, staring at Marie.*]

MARIE (*to Professor*): And you certainly succeeded. You had every man and woman in this theatre

too sick with fright to think of anything else. We all forgot about you—and your kind.

[She moves towards him a little. Every one turns their eyes on the Professor. There is silence. The Professor looks from one to the other and suddenly backs a step towards the corpse. He is scared but defiant.

Ridley breaks in, with a brisk air of control of the situation which he doesn't really feel.]

RIDLEY: That'll do. He gave his opinion at my request. You're wasting time.

MARIE (*interrupting*): No, he gained time. Didn't you?

PROFESSOR: I gave my opinion—I didn't want to give any opinion at all. I told you I might be wrong—but suppose I had been right and I hadn't told you?

PETER: The man didn't have the plague. And you said he had.

PROFESSOR: I was wrong. In Heaven's name, haven't I had right to.

MARIE	}	(together): No!
PETER		
MILOSH		
DUVAL		

[The Professor backs further. He turns and whips the cloak off the face of the corpse, standing between it and the audience.]

PROFESSOR: Look at this, come and look. The symptoms—look, the subcutaneous hæmorrhage discolouring the skin—black, look at it. The swelling—I'll show you—in the groin—

[No-one comes any nearer, as the Professor starts to tug aside the coat that covers the rest of the body.]

MARIE: Stop that! (*she swings away from the sight of the body and finds herself facing audience*). He's

trying it again: a trick! A trick to distract our attention from him. That's how he did it before. Aren't I right?

[*The others on the stage are distracted from watching the Professor by turning to Marie. The Professor lets go of the coat and turns to watch her too. Ridley grabs her by the arm.*]

RIDLEY: Be quite, you little fool! You're getting hysterical.

[*The Professor, half hypnotised, is just dropping the crimson cloak over the face when Bauer, coming on from the back, sees the corpse. He does a double-take.*]

BAUER: The corpse! On my stage! You filthy tramps—

RIDLEY (*shouting*): Shut up! (*To Professor*) Why the devil did you bring it down here, you fool?

PROFESSOR: The Medical Officer—

RIDLEY: Blast the Medical Officer! With a mob like that on the edge of hysteria (*he snatches the cloak from the Professor's hand and drops it over the face of the corpse*).

[*Barnes comes on from behind as he speaks.*]

BARNES (*not noticing Ridley*): Almighty! You're not dissecting that flaming corpse on the stage? Take it down to the boiler room where the rest of the stiffies are. Sorry, sir, I didn't see you.

RIDLEY: To the boiler room—take it down. (*To Jaroslav*) You too.

BAUER (*with dignity*): Those are German dead.

RIDLEY (*after a moment's pause*): And this man died of conditions in a German camp.

BARNES (*to Bauer*): That'll be enough from you. You've had your big moment you monkey. Off till you're wanted.

[Anna is inclined to cling to Jaroslav to restrain him, feeling the common unreasoning revulsion from the corpse, but he puts her aside and with the Professor carries the corpse off stage. Meanwhile Bauer scuttles for the ladder.]

PETER (*as they go, to Marie*): You were right. 'The Poles, you see? It was a device of the Poles. We must have them watched. •

[He and Marie join Milosh in a whispered colloquy up stage.] •

BARNES: What was all that, sir?

RIDLEY (*aside to Barnes*): Nearly a nasty moment. They were working up to lynch the Polish doctor.

BARNES: Ah-ah. We're off again.

RIDLEY: No, no. Just a natural reaction of a mob that's been frightened. 'They're all right now.

BARNES: Maybe.

PETER: You go on down then.

BARNES: All set behind and outside for the first CONVOY, sir.

RIDLEY: Good (*he turns and takes some papers from the table*). Eastbound . . . (*he sorts out a map and some papers for Barnes*).

[Milosh, Marie and Peter glance to see that Ridley and Barnes are busy. Milosh, with one eye on Ridley and Barnes, slips off in the direction taken by the Professor and Jaroslav. Anna has been watching.]

ANNA: What are you plotting? Where have you sent that man? Where have you sent that man? (*To Draja*) They're sending that man to follow my husband and the Professor.

DRAJA: Wait. It is better to stay where he left you. He'll be back.

[Anna turns for advice to Duval. Duval has been keeping his eye on Marie.] •

DUVAL (*preoccupied*): Yes, better wait. See what happens. (*Realising this may frighten Anna*) Of course, nothing will happen.

[*As Ridley is sorting the papers, Barnes is watching this interchange not liking the sound of it.*]

BARNES (*quietly, to Ridley*): Pumping up again, sir.

[*He looks at Marie. She is indicating Anna, Duval, and Draja to Peter.*]

MARIE (*scornfully amused*): Listen to them!

RIDLEY (*preoccupied, answering Barnes*): Mm?

[*He follows Barnes's eye-line, and looks at Marie, giving her a nice, still preoccupied smile.*]

(*To Barnes giving him map and papers*) Right. There you are: Eastbound. Take them from the back first. (*He goes down stage and calls out to the audience*) Well there's nothing to hold us up now and we're starting to move you off as fast as we can. The first eastbound convoy is leaving at once. The Sergeant here is in charge of the loading. He will sort people out as he wants them. Everybody's to stay put till the Sergeant tells them to move. Got that? (*To Barnes*) O.K. You're starting behind.

BARNES: Yes, sir. (*To Peter*) Come with me.

[*Barnes goes off. He pauses as he passes Peter and then beckons him with a jerk of his head. Peter hesitates, looks at Marie, they exchange a nod and Peter picks up his traps and follows Barnes off.*]

RIDLEY (*to Marie*): That woman in the box, the wife of the Russian—get her off with this first batch. And I want to make sure the Jewess with the baby goes early too. Duval, rout her out and take her along to the Sergeant.

[*Marie, on her way across to obey Ridley's instruction, pauses to hear Duval's answer.*]

DUVAL: There are many French with young children, Captain, and many of us—many have special need to get home, for one reason or another. Would it not be possible, with organisation to let them—

RIDLEY: Eastbound first.

DUVAL (*glancing surreptitiously at Marie, softly to Ridley*): There is real danger to some of us, Captain, if we do not get the chance to explain before—

RIDLEY: In heaven's name, man, what are you afraid of? You're innocent—you say. All right. Is there no justice in France?

DUVAL (*indignantly*): In France? Capitaine, in the Third Republic—

MARIE: The Fourth Republic—

DUVAL: Captain—

MARIE: Or the Union of French Soviet Republics . . . No room, Duval. No *room* for you.

RIDLEY: Duval—Marie!

DUVAL: Yes, Captain?

RIDLEY: Think. You've been working *together*, all of you. Remember?

DUVAL: Yes, yes, of course. The Communists were afraid for themselves, too. There was no special danger for us then. Now—there is danger. Merciful heaven, can't you see? The world is not all so simple, so soldierly, Captain. There is no plague. Good. *But I am afraid.*

RIDLEY (*to Marie*): Get that Russian woman down. *Now.*

[*Marie smiles and goes.*]

RIDLEY (*to Duval*): Look. You want to get to hell out of here?

DUVAL (*eagerly*): I must!

RIDLEY: Nothing's stopping you. The doors are open.

DUVAL: But—the transport, for the next stage . . .

RIDLEY: Walk (*shrugs expressively and turns back to his papers*).

DUVAL: Captain, we are not soldiers. We are not even men and women, individuals. We . . . We have been numbers so long on the roll call of a labour camp, I don't know, but . . . I could not face it, the organisation, the planning; a trek on foot across half Germany and two thirds of France!

RIDLEY: Oh, come! A one man campaign!

DUVAL: One *man*? I am a Displaced *Person*, Captain . . . It's not the same thing.

RIDLEY: All right! But then you must work your share. You must co-operate.

ANNA: Captain, my husband has been gone a long time with the Professor and the—the dead man. I think I had better go and look for them.

RIDLEY: Mm? Oh, Lord, no. You stay here, for heaven's sake, or we shall have you losing each other and getting into different convoys. (*To Duval*) Well? Do we get nothing in return for this thankless task or reorganising your lives? Will you co-operate?

[*Anna is unobtrusively slipping off without Ridley noticing.*]

DUVAL: Efficient organisation by officials is essential, and co-operation by the public, but, Captain—perhaps you haven't got a little land of your own? In England, I've heard, so few people own a little land of their own. If I could explain . . . If information is laid against me, they may confiscate my land. Prison again (*he shrugs*)—never mind that—but they may take my farmland, Captain, take it away. What is one *for*, after that?

RIDLEY: Well, what am I to do . . . You must vote yourself a government that—

DUVAL: Politics! Decent people in my country don't

mix themselves in politics. It's personal. It's persecution. You've heard that girl, that Communist slut, it's a question of life and death, and that—

RIDLEY: What happens to you after you get home is your own affair, not mine. I'm not going to wet-nurse the whole squalling pack of you for ever.

DUVAL: Life and death, Captain! Life and death!

[*Marie has come on briskly, and caught the last words.*]

MARIE: Life and death? Still at it?

RIDLEY: Did you get that woman down to the trucks?

MARIE: No. I came down for brandy. She is too shaken. (*To Duval*) You can wriggle and twist with him, but not with us. We're realists.

RIDLEY: *Get that brandy.*

MARIE: Yes. (*To Duval*) Where did they put it when they were sorting the stores?

DUVAL (*absently*): Under the stage. In the little room at the back. You mean to inform against me?

MARIE (*over her shoulder*): If it was the last thing I did I should inform against you.

[*She slides down into the orchestra pit. Duval shivers.*]

RIDLEY: Enough talk, Duval. Hurry. That Jewess goes on the first convoy, or, by heaven, you go on the last.

DUVAL: Yes. Yes.

[*Peter hurries on a little breathless. Duval takes the opportunity, Ridley being temporarily distracted, to slip casually down into the orchestra pit.*]

[*Exit Duval.*]

PETER: Message from your sergeant. He has sent a man for the soldiers he dismissed from guarding the doors.

[*Peter makes as though to hurry off again, when Ridley calls after him.*]

RIDLEY: What? Why was that?

PETER: The Westerners. They're rushing the East-bound trucks.

[*Bauer comes on and starts re-arranging the tables and chairs, unobtrusively.*]

One has driven off.

RIDLEY: But the driver—

PETER: A Latvian or a Lithuanian, I think—A Russian now, anyhow. But he called out he wouldn't drive Eastwards towards the Russian lines.

RIDLEY: I'll—no, I can't leave that lot out there (*indicating the Audience*). Can't you make the drivers see reason?

PETER: I told them they'd be liquidated if they were reactionary. It did no good.

RIDLEY: It wouldn't. Get back, and for pity's sake, don't try to help *that way*. Stay put till you get the word to move. (*He looks at them with failing hope*) I'm having the doors guarded again. (*Aside*) Sulky brutes!

[*He turns back to the table which Bauer has finished rearranging for him.*]

JIRI: I go now with the Russian.

RIDLEY: The who?

JIRI: The Russian—the machine man.

RIDLEY: The *Russian*—oh, he's gone (*he sits back at table*).

BAUER: Sir, if we were to move those steps—I have an office set—panelled walls, sir, and mock book-cases. It is from a murder play: *Murder in the Library*. You cannot work in an office efficiently, sir, when it looks like this.

[*Ridley is paying no attention, and after a moment Bauer shrugs and leaves, Ridley has sunk down and is staring at the audience in a brown study.*]

RIDLEY: What a party.

[*Rebecca appears, hung about with bundles, the child in her arms. With the threat removed, she is a different woman.*]

[*There is a scuffle off, and Anna rushes on, tugging Jaroslav and followed by the Professor. The two latter look considerably shaken.*]

ANNA: They locked him in when he was putting the body in the cellar! Locked him in the boiler room with the dead to die, to die! And him (*indicating the Professor*) To die! (*Calling*) Bring him in, hurry! Show the Officer.

DRAJA (*off*): I'm trying. I'm coming.

ANNA (*forcing herself in front of Ridley*): My man and the Professor—the Russians and the Communists tried to bury them alive (*shudders*).

[*Ridley turns reluctantly. The Professor and Jaroslav go to the assistance of Draja, who is frog-marching Milosh on to the stage.*]

DRAJA: The Polish woman heard them calling, she came to get help.

ANNA: He did it—he had the key! I saw him plotting with the Russian and the French girl on the stage here. Leave them to rot there alive—now, when there is peace!

RIDLEY: Nonsense. The door slammed—locked itself. Must have . . .

PROFESSOR: I'm sorry. Call it making more trouble if you like . . . He did it.

RIDLEY: But what possible reason could he have to do such a thing?

PROFESSOR: They believed I tricked them.

JAROSLAV: They meant to leave us there to rot.

RIDLEY: Don't be an infernal idiot, man—

JAROSLAV: We are Poles. They have no use for us.

[*Enter Peter.*]

PETER: Where's Jiri?

RIDLEY: What?

PETER: Jiri.

RIDLEY: Damn! I told him you'd gone. Look—wait a minute.

ANNA: Him! It was him. He told this man. I saw him . . .

RIDLEY (*to Peter*): Are you in this too? (*To Milosh*)
Speak up. What did happen?

MILOSH: Like they said.

RIDLEY: I don't believe it.

PETER: They are dangerous, these Poles. This Professor is too clever, and the other is stupid. They are Fascists. Twenty million of my countrymen—men, women and children they wiped out—the Fascists—and all we were building. It must not happen again.

RIDLEY: Nobody wants it to happen again. You're in no danger. Nobody wants to do you any harm.

[*Sound of drum.*]

[*Ridley rushes down stage.*]

What the—a woman! The French girl.

[*The drum beats have weakened and we hear the handle of the drumstick rattling as it falls to the floor.*]

Go on down . . . she's hurt.

[*The Professor, Draja and Milosh have come down stage.*]

PROFESSOR: She's fainted across the drum.

RIDLEY: Get her up here, you two. This doesn't make sense. She was perfectly—

[Milosh leaps down into the orchestra pit as he speaks, followed by Bauer.]

MILOSH (*up to steps*): She's—her throat!

RIDLEY: What?

MILOSH: I can't see.

RIDLEY: Pass her up. Steady.°

[Bauer and Milosh drag Marie into view from the depths of the orchestra pit. She is bundled up on to the stage, Ridley and the Professor helping. Jaroslav, Anna and Draja hang back, the men looking at each other and shrugging, puzzled but not caring. Just as they are getting her on to the stage Ridley starts with horror and nearly drops her.]

No!

[Ridley and the Professor look at each other in silence for a second, and then get Marie on to the stage. During the manhandling of her it is contrived that her head is hidden from the audience, and now the Professor crouches, holding her head and shoulders on his knees. Anna gives a choking scream and hides her face against Jaroslav. Draja comes slowly forward, staring with interest. Bauer climbs back on to the stage and goes round the Professor to look at her. He starts, and half makes a gesture indicating his beloved stage, but stops.]

MILOSH: Is it—

RIDLEY (*to Anna*): Your head scarf.

[Ridley snatches the scarf from her and tosses it to the Professor, who binds Marie's throat. There is a second's pause. The Professor looks up at Ridley and nods.]

She's not—

PROFESSOR: I'm afraid so.

RIDLEY: And I only saw her for the first time today. On her way back! How could any of them do that to one of themselves—on their way back!

PROFESSOR: Bauer, the German?

RIDLEY: He was up there. And then here on the stage with me. (*To Milosh*) Quick, under the stage, bring up anyone you find there—anyone. (*To Draja*) Tell the Sergeant to have the doors guarded again.

[*He starts to offer Milosh his revolver. Milosh produces his own, and drops into the Orchestra Pit. Draja hurries off.*]

PROFESSOR (*indicating Milosh*): It could have been him.

RIDLEY: He was busy trying to fix *you*—or so you said.

PROFESSOR: Besides—of course—they were on the same side.

RIDLEY: You and she weren't.

PROFESSOR: You're out of your mind. Besides, I was locked in the boiler-room—with a witness.

RIDLEY: Of the same way of thinking.

JAROSLAV: You can't suspect—

RIDLEY: I can suspect every man and woman in this theatre . . . Duval!

ANNA (*scornfully*): The farmer? He was terrified of her.

RIDLEY: Terrified! Terrified to desperation. (*Shouting*) Duval! Duval!

[*Everyone looks about and listens. There is no sound.*]

JAROSLAV: That's the way a farmer would kill—the throat cut like a pig or a sheep.

RIDLEY: Shut up! . . . It's true, though.

JAROSLAV: Badly done, in a hurry. They die slowly—

RIDLEY: That was why the drum—her throat cut, she couldn't cry out!

[*Milosh reappears in the orchestra pit.*]

MILOSH: No one here.

RIDLEY: I don't believe he'd leave, he wanted that transport. He'd stay and deny it. (*To Audience*) He's somewhere in this theatre. (*To Bauer*) Get those lights up.

BAUER: The house lights? I told you: that circuit has gone.

RIDLEY: Damn.

BAUER: Use the spot sir.

RIDLEY: Duval, the French farmer. You've all seen him. Is he among you? He may be sitting next to you.

[*Barnes hurries on followed by Draja.*]

BARNES: Duval left, sir. Five minutes ago.

RIDLEY: Hell.

BARNES: Sorry, sir. Never occurred to me to stop him. One less headache, I felt. You're sure it was—? (*he has come down to the Professor and looks at Marie*). Slit her throat. He would.

RIDLEY (*revolted: to Professor and Bauer*): Take her off the stage. (*To Barnes*) You were right to send for those men back. We're on a live volcano again.

BARNES: Not so good outside either. And now murder in here! Are you O.K. sir?

[*The Professor and Bauer are carrying Marie off. Where she has been lying there is a dark patch on the matting.*]

RIDLEY: None of us is O.K. Every man and woman in this place is a living threat and a living victim . . . Your men *have* arrived?

BARNES: Just now, sir. But I ought to get back. If anything really breaks now (*he shrugs expressively*).

[*Bauer comes back on to the stage, carrying a fire bucket from which he scatters handfuls of sand over the patch on the matting and goes off again.*]

RIDLEY (*laughs*): The only sane man left in the place—and he's a monomaniac . . .

BARNES: Can I ask for a relief for this squad from their unit—officially?

RIDLEY: No. This is just—an incident.

BARNES: We can't kid ourselves, sir.

RIDLEY: We're armed, aren't we?

BARNES (*jerking his head towards the audience and backstage*): So are they—our Gallant Allies. Remember?

[*The Professor comes back on to the stage, rubbing his hands on a rag of a handkerchief. He sees Milosh and stands scared and hesitant, remembering. He backs towards Milosh. Ridley notices them.*]

RIDLEY: Stop that! Stop cringing; and stop glowering, you! No one's threatening you—and you're not threatening anyone.

BARNES (*softly*): We can't handle it piece-meal, sir.

PROFESSOR: So you'll blind yourself again. There's nothing wrong! No—something happened down there that we know nothing about, and a girl's dead. And you say again: "Stop, stop! No one is threatening anyone!" You saw them turn on me, you've seen that girl with her throat cut, but we're all good friends and Allies. Open your eyes, man. We're *all* afraid.

RIDLEY: We are not all afraid.

JAROSLAV: You can say that with an army behind you.

BARNES: Shouting outside, sir. I'll be back (*he starts to leave*).

RIDLEY: It's those damned Westerners—they're rushing the Eastbound trucks. Can your men hold them?

BARNES: I don't like the sound of it. They'll be shooting in a minute.

MILOSH (*significantly*): He hasn't got an army behind him. He's alone.

[*Barnes hesitates.*]

He's on your side one moment, on mine the next.

RIDLEY: I'm with none of you against the others.

PETER: Leave us to take over. We know what we want.

•

[*They all glower at Ridley in silence for a moment. He stands perfectly still.*]

Who are you to dictate to us. Why should we obey you?

RIDLEY: Because, my friend, you're in German territory under British control.

MILOSH: And why British control? Why? eh? Why?

RIDLEY: Do you suppose you'd be left to mill about and murder as you choose in an American, a French, a Russian zone?

MILOSH: Don't draw your revolver. We're armed too—you know that now. (*To Barnes*) Nor you. Keep still.

RIDLEY: I'm drawing no gun. You see? I'm not afraid. There'll be no shooting.

PROFESSOR: You're not afraid. Murder, and terror, and violence all round you, and you can afford to close your eyes. Can you? We're a thousand here to one of you.

RIDLEY: And I still say I need no gun. You fools, you fools! You've seen it work! Just because for an hour you were all terrified of the same thing instead of each other, you made it work. You've given the answer yourselves. You can forget these 100 wars of yours and live as men and women.

PROFESSOR: Open your eyes and face reality. No

common fear now—all these things to tear us apart and nothing to hold us together.

[Barnes hand goes to his Sten as he moves. Milosh moves his revolver to cover him.]

RIDLEY: That's not true. It isn't only a common fear, which will hold you together—your common humanity will do it, in spite of you again and again. You heard the singer, here, you saw what she did? One human voice, holding all this chaos together, drying up that panic before it broke? It can be done, you've seen it done! You worked together, you listened together, you're still the same people . . . There'll be no shooting.

[Shooting.]

All right—I've failed. But at least you've seen it can be done.

[A prolonged burst of firing can be heard. All except Ridley and Barnes look at each other. Slowly, they all look back at Ridley and Barnes. Slow Curtain.]

FAMILY PORTRAIT

A play in three acts

by

LENORE COFFEE

and

IV. JOYCE COWEN

“And he went out from thence, and came into his own country: and his disciples follow him. And when the Sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the Synagogue; and many hearing him were astonished, saying—

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joseph, and of Juda, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.”

ST. MARK, 6 : 1-4

The cast of the New York production of *Family Portrait* at the Morosco Theatre on March 8, 1939, was as follows:

MARY	-	-	-	<i>Judith Anderson</i>
DANIEL	-	-	-	<i>Ronald Reiss</i>
JOSEPH	-	-	-	<i>Norman Stuart</i>
A SHEPHERD	-	-	-	<i>Max Leavitt</i>
NAOMI, <i>Simon's wife</i>	-	-	-	<i>Virginia Campbell</i>
JUDAH	-	-	-	<i>James Harker</i>
MARY CLEOPHAS, <i>Mary's sister-in-law</i>				<i>Evelyn Varden</i>
REBA, <i>Joseph's wife</i>	-	-	-	<i>Lois Austin</i>
SIMON	-	-	-	<i>Tom Ewell</i>
JAMES	-	-	-	<i>Philip Coolidge</i>
MORDECAI	-	-	-	<i>William Foran</i>
SELIMA	-	-	-	<i>Kathryn Grill</i>
EBEN, <i>a pedlar</i>	-	-	-	<i>Philip Truex</i>
MATHIAS	-	-	-	<i>Hugh Rennie</i>
A DISCIPLE	-	-	-	<i>Leonard Elliott</i>
HEPZIBAH	-	-	-	<i>Eula Guy</i>
APPIUS HADRIAN	-	-	-	<i>Guy Spaul</i>
ANNA	-	-	-	<i>Ruth Chorpennig</i>
RABBI SAMUEL	-	-	-	<i>Bram Nossen</i>
MENDEL	-	-	-	<i>Will Lee</i>
A WOMAN OF JERUSALEM	-	-	-	<i>Lois Jameson</i>
A CHILD	-	-	-	<i>Eugene Schiel</i>
MARY OF MAGDALA	-	-	-	<i>Margaret Webster</i>
NATHAN	-	-	-	<i>Ronald Hammond</i>
DANIEL, <i>aged 16</i>	-	-	-	<i>Philip Truex</i>
ESTHER, <i>Joseph's daughter</i>	-	-	-	<i>Josephine McKim</i>
LEBAN, <i>of Damascus</i>	-	-	-	<i>Guy Spaul</i>
JOSHUA, <i>his son</i>	-	-	-	<i>Neal Berry</i>
BEULAH	-	-	-	<i>Ruth Chorpennig</i>

Produced by Margaret Webster.

The play ran for 111 performances.

The cast of the London production of *Family Portrait* at the Strand Theatre on February 17, 1948, was as follows:

MARY	-	-	-	<i>Fay Compton</i>
DANIEL	-	-	-	<i>Michael Nicholls</i>
JOSEPH	-	-	-	<i>Raymond Westwell</i>
NAOMI	-	-	-	<i>Joan Matheson</i>
JUDAH	-	-	-	<i>David Markham</i>
MARY CLEOPHAS	-	-	-	<i>- Clare Harris</i>
REBA	-	-	-	<i>- Mary Hignett</i>
SIMON	-	-	-	<i>Richard Pearson</i>
JAMES	-	-	-	<i>Ernest Clark</i>
MORDECAI	-	-	-	<i>Norman Webb</i>
SELIMA	-	-	-	<i>- Ellen Pollock</i>
EBEN	-	-	-	<i>- Paul Jones</i>
AMOS	-	-	-	<i>Henry Moxon</i>
FISHERMAN	-	-	-	<i>Andrew Laurence</i>
MATHIAS	-	-	-	<i>Gerald Welch</i>
A DISCIPLE	-	-	-	<i>- Shaun Noble</i>
HEPZIBAH	-	-	-	<i>Beryl Harrison</i>
APPIUS HADRIAN	-	-	-	<i>- John Witty</i>
ANNA	-	-	-	<i>Doreen Richards</i>
RABBI SAMUEL	-	-	-	<i>Anthony Sharp</i>
MENDEL	-	-	-	<i>Daniel Wherry</i>
WOMEN OF JERUSALEM	-	-	-	<i>Pauline Loring</i> <i>Beatrice Mackey</i>
MARY MAGDALEN	-	-	-	<i>- Mary Horn</i>
NATHAN	-	-	-	<i>Andrew Laurence</i>
DANIEL	-	-	-	<i>James Viccars</i>
ESTHER	-	-	-	<i>Josephine Ingram</i>
BEULAH	-	-	-	<i>Pauline Loring</i>
LEBAN	-	-	-	<i>Norman Rutherford</i>
JOSHUA	-	-	-	<i>Henry Moxon</i>

Produced by Chloe Gibson.

The play ran for 38 performances.

Characters

MARY is a slight woman of about forty-five but looks younger. There are understanding and humour in her face, as well as sweetness and great character.

DANIEL is a small boy of six or thereabouts.

NAOMI is an attractive young woman—amiable, rather immature. She is DANIEL's mother.

JUDAH is the youngest son—a boy of seventeen. He is gay and charming and he and his mother are very close.

MARY CLEOPHAS is a rather large, middle-aged woman. She is shrewd of eye, aggressive in manner, but kind.

REBA is a little older than NAOMI, handsome in a dark way, and inclined to take everything very seriously.

JOSEPH is the third son in the family, usually breezy, energetic—a born “go-getter.”

SIMON is next to JOSEPH in age, eager to please—*anxious to be on the right side.*

JAMES is the eldest, next to Jesus, tall, austere and bigoted.

MORDECAI is a stoutish man of 50.

APPIUS HADRIAN *A rather resplendent Roman.*

HEPZIBAH is a large, voluble, middle-aged woman of dubious sincerity.

ANNA *Another neighbour—a smaller, younger woman than Hepzibah.*

MARY MAGDALEN is plainly dressed but carries her clothes with a certain air. She has beautiful red hair.

SCENES

ACT ONE

SCENE I *A house in Nazareth. Summer.*

SCENE II *Wineshop at Capernaum. The following Spring.*

ACT TWO

SCENE I *The house in Nazareth. A year later.*

SCENE II *The following week.*

ACT THREE

SCENE I *A street in Jerusalem. Spring of the following year.*

SCENE II *A house in Jerusalem. The same night.*
[*The curtain will be lowered during this scene to denote a brief lapse of time.*]

SCENE III *The house in Nazareth. Some years later.*

All enquiries regarding performance of this play must be sent to Christopher Mann Ltd., 140 Park Lane, London, W.1.

ACT ONE

Scene I

THE COURTYARD OF A SIMPLE CARPENTER'S HOUSE IN
NAZARETH.

Upstage Centre is the main building, a low plaster house with a wooden door in the centre. On the Left corner of the house is a fig tree in full leaf, under which a round bench has been built. A small table Left of tree. Farther to the Left are a few stone steps which lead up to a wooden annex of the house. At the Right side of the house is a wooden shed that is used as a carpenter shop. It has a carpenter's bench and tools. Above the shed is a wooden sign on which is painted the word—CARPENTER. At Right is part of the plaster wall which surrounds the farm, the visible portion stretching from downstage Right to upstage Right. On the downstage Right corner of the wall is a heavy wooden garden gate, which can be bolted with a heavy wooden bar. In the yard are a large table Left Centre and numerous stools, benches, etc.; a chair and wood basket Right of step Centre; a chair or stool at Right Centre. In the distance are soft rolling hills and far away one can see the outlines of another little farm.

Early morning. Just before the rise of curtain a cock crows. At rise of curtain the stage is empty. A little flutter of breeze rustles the thick leaves of the fig tree.

Mary comes in Centre from the house with a tray of dishes and a tablecloth folded over her arm. She is a slight woman of about forty-five but looks younger. There are understanding and humour in her face, as well as sweetness and great character. She moves quickly and deftly. She puts the tray down on the seat under the fig tree and then lays the cloth, spreading it carefully. The cock crows again. This time it is an-

swered by the bleating of sheep and goats. Mary starts to put the dishes on the table. Daniel, a small boy of six or thereabouts, dressed only in shorts, comes from upstairs, rubbing his eyes sleepily. He is dragging a small shirt in his other hand. He yawns as he says:

DANIEL (*leaves door open, crosses to C.*): Morning, Grandmother! (*Kisses her.*)

MARY (*R. of table—turns to him*): Morning, Daniel! How's my big helper? (*Sees him*) Gracious, child, aren't you dressed yet?

DANIEL: A button came off my pants. (*Backs around so we see braces dangle.*)

MARY: Your mother sewed it on only yesterday—

DANIEL: It came off again. I was out playing with the boys after school and—

MARY (*kneels R. of table*): —and you don't know how it happened? It just hopped off by itself— (*Hugs him*) Never mind— (*Kisses him*) we'll hold your braces with a pin—this once. But don't tell your mother! (*She takes a large pin from her belt and fastens brace to pants top. As soon as pinning is done she helps him into his shirt.*)

JOSEPH (*sticks head out door up L. to speak*): Hasn't that boy gone for the goat yet?

MARY: He can't until I fix his braces.

JOSEPH: Well, hurry it up, will you, Mother? We have to have breakfast early this morning.

MARY: Yes—I know (*continues fastening*). There—I hope this will hold—at least until you get home from school. What did you learn there yesterday?

DANIEL (*putting on his shirt—Mary helps*): Oh, lots of things. The days of the week—the months of the year. You know, I think it's a waste of time for me to learn all that stuff, if I'm going to be a carpenter. I can whittle like anything already—

MARY: There you are! Now, hurry and get the goat, dear. (*Hears shepherd's pipes*) The shepherds are out

with their flocks already. And we're in a rush for breakfast this morning.

PIPER (*passing by gate R.*): Good morning, Daniel!

DANIEL: Hello!

MARY: Good morning!

DANIEL (*starts to go—stops R.*): Do I have to go and get that ol' goat again? (*Crosses to C.*) I got her yesterday. It's Esther's turn.

[*Music of pipes starts off.*]

MARY (*above table*): Esther had an earache last night. Aunt Reba's keeping her in bed.

DANIEL: Well, I got her the morning before, too. And she *butted* me—hard! (*Rubs self.*)

MARY: You don't want her to butt Esther, do you? Especially with an earache.

DANIEL: That isn't where she butted me!

[*Pipes stop.*]

MARY (*from above table crosses to Daniel C. She speaks quickly, in a low voice*): Look, darling—it's very important that we don't upset anyone this morning any more than we can help.

DANIEL: Why?

MARY: Well—something happened last night that disturbed your uncles very much.

DANIEL: Father, too?

MARY: Yes. So I want everything to be as pleasant as possible. It will help me a lot. Now, go along like a good boy and get the goat. (*Daniel unbars gate—puts bar downstage against post. She adds*) I'm baking cookies this afternoon.

DANIEL (*smiling*): I'll run.

[*Mary gives him a little hug. Crosses below table. Daniel exits gate. Mary half laughs, half sighs. Naomi comes from the house, leaves door open. She is an attractive young woman—amiable, rather immature. She is Daniel's mother.*]

NAOMI (*up C. with small bowl of eggs—one egg in her hand*): I was thinking—the boys ought to have an egg for breakfast if they're going to do that job out in the country. (*Puts bowl on tray on table*) It's a long way.

MARY (*below table above bench*): That's a good idea. (*Pause*) Simon up yet?

NAOMI (*gets chair from up C.—starts to table with it*): He's dressing.

MARY (*setting table—below it—moving to L. end*): Did he—did he say anything when he came to bed last night?

NAOMI: He kept me awake half the night talking. (*Puts chair at upper R. end of table, steps below it. Adds impulsively*) You know, I think they ought to show you a little more consideration—and I told him so!

MARY (*crosses from L. end of table—below it to Naomi and puts an affectionate hand on Naomi's arm*): You're a good girl, Naomi—like my own daughter. But if you don't agree with your husband—don't say anything.

NAOMI: Of course, Simon by himself wouldn't be so bad if Joseph didn't keep him all stirred up.

MARY: Well, brothers are like that. (*Naomi starts to speak "But I don't see"*) Would you like to mix the porridge for me? That'll be a real help.

[*Naomi exits C. with bowl on tray, and Mary picks up the small wood basket L. of shop and starts towards the carpenter shop just as Judah, the youngest son—a boy of seventeen, comes down the stairs whistling. Closes the door after himself. He is gay and charming and he and his mother are very close.*]

JUDAH (*crosses to Mary, takes basket. They are up C., Judah L. of Mary*): Morning, Mother! (*Kisses her.*)

MARY: Morning, Judah!

JUDAH: Here—let me do that.

MARY: Early breakfast—

JUDAH: I know. (*Crosses R. of Mary*) Isn't it just like Mordecai? (*Mary gets stool from near post L. Judah—talking over his shoulder just inside shop*) After holding back on that roofing job all summer, he sends word last night that he wants the work started *today*. (*Starts putting chips in basket*) And ~~he~~ won't pay a cent more than the price we made when labour was cheap.

MARY (*puts stool lower R. end table*): You'll have a hard time making money on it—but you may get other jobs through it. (*To above table with dishes.*)

JUDAH (*in shop*): What was the row last night? (*Picks up basket—crosses L. of door*) I heard old James going on at a great rate—so I slid off to bed—

MARY (*avoiding an answer—above table*): You were late coming home—

JUDAH (*to below step up C.*): I went to see Miriam—(*Puts basket down up L.C.*) And, Mother, what do you think? (*Easily side-tracked*) Aaron let us talk together *alone*—for five whole minutes!

MARY (*smiling*): And what did you say?

JUDAH: Oh, we didn't say anything. I just looked—and she smiled. It was wonderful! (*Pause, then eagerly*) You know, I think I'll take that job at Choraizon. If I'm going to get married, I'll have to earn more money.

MARY: *Married?*

JUDAH: I'm going on seventeen!

MARY (*above table*): So you are. Well Miriam's a lovely girl. But are you sure it's all right with her father?

JUDAH: Why not?

MARY: I've always thought he was kind of ambitious. Still, *we've* nothing to be ashamed of.

JUDAH (*crossing C. toward Mary*): Well, I told you he left us *alone*!

MARY: So you did. (*Crosses to him. Puts her arm*

around him) My baby getting married! (*The gate opens and Mary Cleophas, a rather large, middle-aged woman, enters. She is shrewd of eye, aggressive in manner—but kind. She is Mary's sister-in-law and neighbour. She leaves gate open. She has a small bowl in her hand. Mary greets her with genuine eagerness and affection. Meets her R.C. They embrace*) Mary Cleophas! My, but I'm glad to see you!

MARY CLEOPHAS: I just came to borrow some barley.

JUDAH (*up L.C.*): Good morning, Aunt Mary!

MARY (*hesitating*): Judah, take the wood inside.

[*Judah takes wood off up c., closes door. Mary crosses below Mary Cleophas to close gate.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS (*crossing L.C.*): Something's happened.

MARY (*at gate*): Yes.

MARY CLEOPHAS: What is it?

MARY (*with a cautious look around—crosses to R. of Mary Cleophas*) Jesus went away last night.

MARY CLEOPHAS: What did the boys say?

MARY: Oh, they're furious!

MARY CLEOPHAS: Well, I knew they would be. And I can't say as I blame them. (*Pause*) How'd it come about?

MARY: He just told them he was going. You know how he is once his mind is made up. Nothing they said could shake him. And he went.

MARY CLEOPHAS: I suppose they blame you.

MARY: Oh, yes. "I encouraged him—didn't think of my other children." I don't think breakfast is going to be very pleasant—no one speaking to anyone. (*Puts hand on Mary Cleophas's arm*) Stay and have it with us. It won't be so bad with you here.

MARY CLEOPHAS: I never knew anyone to stop being unpleasant on my account—but I'll be glad to stay. (*Sits R. end stool—face C.*) So he left. (*Puts bowl on table upper R. corner*) How long will he be gone?

MARY: I—I don't know—exactly—

MARY CLEOPHAS: You mean he didn't say?

MARY (*R. of Mary Cleophas—uneasily*): I don't suppose he *knew*. He'll stay until he's done what he set out to do. (*Then, with a little rising panic in her voice at Mary Cleophas's dubious expression*) He's always come back before! That time he went away with John—he came back, didn't he? And the forty days he spent in the desert—he came back. (*She is trying to convince herself*) He's *always* come back.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Of course. I was just wondering. (*Pause*) I hope you did right letting him go.

MARY: If you could have seen his face! I never saw *anyone* look so happy. As if he was *ready* for something.

[*There is a commotion outside the gate.*]

DANIEL (*outside gate*): Ouch—come here, you old goat. Quick! Someone help me!

MARY: That's Daniel with the goat—What is it, darling? (*Mary hurries to the gate and Daniel tumbles on floor down L. of Mary.*)

DANIEL: She got away! And she *butted* me—just like I told you she would! And in the same place, too! (*He rubs his little bottom. Judah comes from the house.*)

MARY (*crosses below table*): Judah, go out and help Daniel with the goat, dear.

JUDAH (*has jug—picks up Daniel and exiting through gate*): Come along, young fellow (*leaves gate open*).

DANIEL (*exiting*): I hate that old goat.

[*Reba comes out of upstairs house—has towel. She is a little older than Naomi, handsome in a dark way, and inclined to take everything very seriously. Closes door.*]

MARY (*meets Reba below L. steps*): Good morning, Reba!

REBA: Good morning, Mother!

MARY: How's Esther's ear?

REBA: Better. (*Crossing down steps*) I put warm oil in it. But the baby's having *such* a time.

MARY: His teeth again?

REBA (*nods*): What with his teeth and Esther's ear I've had an awful night. And poor Joseph—he never slept a wink!

MARY (*deliberately misunderstanding*): Well, when you have children they do keep you awake. His father walked the floor many a night with *him*—

REBA (*interrupting*): It wasn't that. Joseph was too *worried* to sleep. No one realises how high-strung he is—or they wouldn't upset him. (*Crosses R.—turns to Mary Cleophas*) Oh, you're out early, aren't you, Auntie? (*Kisses her.*)

MARY (*to Reba—crosses up L. of table*): Aunt Mary is having some breakfast with us this morning. Will you tell Naomi? (*Reba crosses up L. To Mary Cleophas*) We're having eggs—the boys have a job of work at Mordecai's. And it's a long walk.

[*Reba exits upstairs—door open.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS (*rises, works around table down R. to L.*): I wouldn't let those boys bully me.

MARY (*busy with napkins at table*): I won't. But I *do* like to have things pleasant. It's hard on Reba and Naomi, too—they're such good girls.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*L. of table*): Reba sounded a bit touchy.

MARY: Oh, well—you don't know what Joseph may have been saying to her. After all, they have to side with their husbands. (*Joseph enters down L. stairs and shuts door. He is the third son in the family, usually breezy, energetic—a born “go-getter.” This morning he is silently belligerent—only waiting for the word to set him off. Mary, with nervous cheerfulness*) Good morning, Joseph—breakfast's nearly ready.

[*Joseph doesn't answer.*] •

MARY CLEOPHAS (*L. of table—Mary above it*): Well, what makes you so gay and chipper?

JOSEPH (*stops when Mary Cleophas speaks*): Oh, good morning, Aunt Mary! I didn't see you. (*He goes past her to the shop and disappears from view temporarily.*)

MARY: You see how it's going to be! (*Smiles*) I'll get the porridge. (*Takes barley bowl off into house.*)

[*Naomi comes out of the house with the eggs and puts them on the table. Now all becomes activity. Simon appears at house door. He is next to Joseph in age, eager to please—anxious to be on the right side. He, too, is far from cheerful. He passes Mary. In door, rolling sleeves up, says:*]

SIMON: Morning, Mother! (*To R. of bench.*)

MARY: Morning, Simon! Sit right down. Everything'll be ready in a moment. (*Daniel appears from the gate and makes a rush for the table*) Daniel, did you wash your hands after bringing that goat in?

DANIEL: They're clean—honest they are! (*He shakes his head.*)

MARY: Run and do it quickly, dear.

NAOMI (*up R. corner of table—removing egg from tray—Simon below table. Mary Cleophas L. of table*): Do as Grandmother says.

[*Daniel rushes into the house, stumbling as he goes.*]

MARY: I never saw a boy yet who wanted to wash. (*Mary Cleophas around L. to below table. Turns to Simon*) I think you were the worst, Simon. (*Smiles*) But they turn out all right. (*She exits into house.*)

SIMON (*to Mary Cleophas. Naomi puts tray on floor, crosses above to L. of table*): What brings you out so early, Aunt Mary?

MARY CLEOPHAS (*crosses below table to sit chair up R. of table*): Well, I got out of the wrong side of the

bed this morning, so I thought I'd come where I could have a pleasant breakfast.

SIMON (*gives her a suspicious look, which she meets blandly*): I hope you get it here. (*Sits R. end of bench below table. Naomi sits down L. of table on bench.*)

[*Joseph comes out from the shop—Reba comes from the house.*]

REBA (*with pitcher of water, puts it on table. Both pause for a moment up L.C.*): Esther's sound asleep—worn out, poor little soul. (*Reba crosses above table to upper end L. stool. Joseph crosses below table to downstage end of L. bench below Reba.*)

MARY (*comes out carrying a bowl of cereal—follows Reba—gives her bowl of cereal, etc., to put on table*): Breakfast, everyone! (*To the others*) Where's James? (*As she speaks James comes from house behind Mary. Crosses up R. of house door with prayer book—he greets her*) Oh, there you are—breakfast's ready. (*Calls*) Judah! Got the milk? (*Moves C. toward gate.*) JUDAH (*entering through gate with jug of milk—shuts gate*): Coming! I've got to wash my hands.

[*Mary takes jug and starts to serve milk. Judah goes into house. James is the eldest, next to Jesus, tall, austere and bigoted. Daniel comes from house—crosses below James to below table R.*]

MARY (*crosses below table to between Naomi and Joseph*): Do sit down, everyone—before things get cold. Eggs—James?

[*Daniel rushes past James in doorway—brushes past Mary to climb over bench and sit between Simon and Naomi. Reba serves first Mary Cleophas, then Daniel, then Naomi, then Joseph, then herself. Puts bowl in centre of table, sits above Joseph. Mary serves milk between Joseph and Naomi.*]

JAMES (*up R.*): I'm fasting.

MARY (*pouring milk into the cups set at each place along the table*) : That's the second time this week.

MARY CLEOPHAS: For goodness sakes, James, unbend and have some eggs.

JAMES (*to Mary—crosses to place L. of Mary*): I'll take a glass of water.

MARY CLEOPHAS: That sounds nice and hearty!

[*All are seated now except Mary. There are three empty places.*]

SIMON: Pass the eggs, please.

JOSEPH: What's the matter with your reach?

[*Naomi passes eggs.*]

REBA: Here, Joseph—take some porridge (*serves him*).

[*There is silence, broken only by the sounds of spoon against plate and cups being put back on the table.*]

MARY (*pours milk between Simon and Mary Cleophas—eager to make conversation*): I've—I've some nice news for you. Something I think will please you all—

JAMES: That will be a novelty (*sits*).

MARY (*continuing*): I think Judah's going to get engaged— (*Pauses hopefully.*)

JOSEPH: So we lose another carpenter!

[*General hubbub until Judah mentions Jesus.*]

MARY (*crossing above table—R. of James*): Oh, no—he'll live right here in town. It's Miriam—

JOSEPH (*brightening*): Old Aaron's girl! Why, that's a good match!

MARY (*happily*): I thought you'd be pleased.

NAOMI (*anxious to help along*): She ought to bring a fine dowry. (*To Daniel*) Not so much in your mouth at once.

[*Judah comes out of the house in high spirits—shuts door.*]

SIMON (*Mary stands in her place—R. of James. Greeting Judah*): Well—well—well—so Judah's got a girl!

JUDAH (*his face falling—steps back*): Who told you? (*R. of stool. R. of table. Looks around table*) Mother—you did!

MARY (*contritely*): I didn't think you'd mind, dear.

JOSEPH: Our baby brother!

SIMON: Going to grow a beard, Judah?

JUDAH (*both pleased and confused*): Miriam doesn't like beards.

REBA (*teasing him. Mary pours water for James*): How does she know?

JUDAH (*steps back C.*): Oh, Mother—make them stop! Besides, it isn't settled yet—

JOSEPH: It *isn't*?

MARY: Oh, it's practically settled. Aaron left them alone together last night—(*Picks up porridge bowl.*)

JOSEPH: (*pleased*): We'll have to tell Mendel to get busy—

[*Judah gives click of annoyance, and turns to Joseph.*]

You *have* to have a marriage broker to arrange about the dowry— (*Breaks off*) The rich shoemaker's daughter—our Judah's doing well for him self—

JUDAH (*hurt*): I don't care *who* her father is—it's Miriam I'm thinking of— (*Sees empty place next to Mary*). Where is Jesus, Mother?

[*All turn to him*].

I wanted him to be the first to know. (*Passes plate*) Porridge please—and lots of milk.

MARY (*nervously*): Oh, I forgot—and set his place.

JUDAH: Isn't he having any breakfast?

[*Sits R. of table below Mary Cleophas. Mary serves him—then herself—returns bowl to table.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS (*to Mary*): Doesn't the boy know?
JUDAH: Know what?

JOSEPH (*pushes his chair back and begins with gusto*): It seems, my dear Judah, that your favourite brother has decided that he has other work to do—work much more important than the mending of roofs and building of barns—so he's left us with the Mordecai job on our hands without so much as a "by your leave"!

MARY (*who is serving herself with porridge puts the bowl down on the table sharply*): That's not fair! You know he's been going to do this other work. You've *always* known—but you've kept him here time after time when he wanted to go. (*Sits R. of James*). And as far as this Mordecai job is concerned, you knew perfectly well that Jesus told you right from the beginning, that he wouldn't be here to do it. (*Joseph interrupts*) You're all my sons, but it's time you learned to stand on your own feet and not rely on him for everything. (*She pauses, a little breathless*) Goodness knows he's the kind that'll carry as big a load as anyone'll give him.

JUDAH: You don't mean he's gone for good?

MARY: No, dear—of course not—

JUDAH: When's he coming back?

MARY: Well, that's hard to say—

JOSEPH (*interrupting*): He hasn't taken us into his confidence. We don't count. We're just his family!

DANIEL: What has Uncle Jesus done, Mama?

NAOMI: Nothing, dear.

DANIEL: Then *why* is everyone angry with him?

SIMON (*hands Daniel's milk cup to him*): Drink your milk—and don't ask questions. (*To Naomi*) I wish someone would teach the boy manners.

[*Naomi looks hurt and whispers to Daniel, who picks up his cup and drinks.*]

Personally, I've nothing against his preaching—but

I don't see why he can't do it on Sundays—or when work is slack.

JAMES: If he wants to preach, why isn't he a Rabbi?

MARY: He doesn't agree with all their ideas.

JOSEPH: Oh, he's going to startle the world

[*Judah turns downstage—not eating.*]

with something new, I suppose! (*Adds sourly*) He's the best carpenter in the family. We won't get half the good jobs without him.

SIMON: And he knows how to get along with people. They liked to do business with him.

JAMES (*rises*): Surely you must all see how unpleasant this is for *me*. After all, I stand for something in the community—

JUDAH (*facing downstage*): I'll miss him so! I'll be lost without him!

MARY (*looks at him*): So will I!

[*Judah turns to Mary.*]

JAMES (*disregarding this*): His views and behaviour are so irregular. It's embarrassing for *me*. After all, my friends are some of the most important men in town. As for these new ideas of his—we believe in the law, according to the law—and no deviation.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Then how's the world ever going to progress?

JAMES (*with bigoted emphasis*): It's better off without progress if you have to break the law to do it. (*Sits.*)

NAOMI (*rising, crossing to gate*): Come along, Daniel—you'll be late for school.

[*Daniel runs to kiss Mary, then off. Naomi puts her shawl on while waiting for Daniel. Naomi shuts gate after she and Daniel exit.*]

JUDAH: I don't see why he hasn't got a right to his own life! He's thirty years old! And he's got a lot of good ideas, too! (*Kneels on stool*) If people

would live the way he wants them to—the world would be a fine place! Room for everyone. (*Look from Joseph*). And he's practical. Believes in paying people decent wages—says a man is worth his hire. But not to worry about being rich. That there're other kinds of riches besides money! (*Sits again.*)

JOSEPH (*with sarcasm*): Hear! Hear!

SIMON: Quite the little orator!

MARY: Why shouldn't Judah defend his brother!

JAMES: What *I* want to know is—why did it have to happen to *us*? Why did we have to have a fanatic like that in the family?

MARY: He's always had these ideas, ever since he was a little boy. You remember when he was only twelve and we left him in the Temple—

JAMES (*interrupting*): Yes, yes, Mother. We all know that by heart! And if he hadn't been encouraged then he wouldn't be doing this now. (*Smugly*) When *I* was a young boy—

MARY CLEOPHAS (*interrupting him*): Get out James! You were *born* middle-aged.

MARY: You know—he always felt he had a special work to do. That time he went with John—

SIMON: A fine end John came to!

MARY (*ignoring this*): And when he stayed away those forty days—he'd made up his mind—

JOSEPH: We know, Mother. We had to listen to him.

MARY: Suppose he has gone out to spread his kind of thinking? After all, what is it? To be kind—to be fair—to love your enemies and do good to those that hate you. What *harm* can come of that?

JOSEPH: Not to *him*, perhaps—but what about us?

SIMON: Yes—we've built up a good business here—

MARY (*interrupting*): With his help.

SIMON (*uncertainly*): That's so Joseph.

JOSEPH (*half rises—across table to Simon. Reba pulls him down again*): So it gives him a right to ruin it?

MARY CLEOPHAS: Well, they say you never know a family till you've had breakfast with them. (*With decision*) You're making too much of the whole thing. He's gone away before—and he'll go away again.

JOSEPH (*coldly*): It isn't as if he had anything important to say. Kindness! You've got to startle people if you want to get any¹where—and who's going to be startled by kindness?

SIMON: I say, let him alone until he gets all this out of his system. Then he'll be glad enough to come back and pick up his saw.

JOSEPH (*quickly*): Say, he didn't take his tools with him, did he?

MARY: No.

JOSEPH (*rises—crosses to below table*): I've had my eye on that saw. (*Goes towards shop up R.*)

SIMON (*rises—following him*) I think I'll take his plane. Mine's pretty dull—

JOSEPH (*turning—Joseph and Simon both up R.*): Wait a minute! You got a new plane only last year. I ought to have this one.

SIMON (*L. of Joseph. Reba up L. stairs, exits, closes door. James moves to Joseph's place*): But you're taking the saw! You can't have them both!

[*During this action Mary and Mary Cleophas start to clear the breakfast table.*]

JOSEPH (*magnanimously*): We could cast lots for them.

[*Joseph moves to shop. Simon down C.*]

SIMON (*gets tools gloomily*): All right. (*Joseph goes to shop door; puts hat on. Simon C. to himself*) But I'm certain to get the saw.

[*As they are about to enter the shop there is a pounding at the gate Judah rises, opens gate and says:*]

JUDAH: Good morning, Mordecai!

MORDECAI (*a stoutish man of fifty, enters gate—to up C.*): You are all still here? Not started yet? Didn't you get my message last night?

JOSEPH (*at shop*): We're getting ready now—

[*James moves to downstage end bench.*]

MORDECAI: Getting ready! And half the morning gone! When it might rain any minute? And my grain all stored in the long barn—and you know how bad the roof is!

[*Simon puts tool kit down L. of shop.*]

JOSEPH (*down C. to Mordecai*): Get the rest of the tools together, Judah. (*Judah crosses up to shop R. of Joseph. To Mordecai*) Don't forget, Mordecai, that we've been after you all summer about that barn, while you've shopped around to get the job done for less money.

SIMON: And when you *couldn't*, you came rushing back to us—and at a price made when materials were cheap.

[*Mary rises—takes tray to below table—stands between table and bench—piling dishes.*]

MORDECAI (*changing his tone*): Well, maybe I *was* wrong—but let's not waste time arguing now. It's been a bad enough year for the farmers as it is—what with the Romans telling us how much grain we shall plant—and how many goats we can raise. (*He sighs.*)

[*Joseph goes into shop for tools. Simon crosses to up R. of Mary Cleophas.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS: But think of the pleasure you get out of kicking about it, Mordecai. You know, I think one of the chief duties of the government is to give the people plenty to kick about—then they haven't time for their other troubles.

[*Joseph and Simon have got their tool-kits from the shop. Judah brings tool-kit down R. above post.*]

JOSEPH (*crossing down L. of Judah—Simon comes to L. of him*): Did you put that plane in—and the saw? The ones that belong to Jesus?

MORDECAI (*he looks around*): I don't see him. Where is he?

[*There is sudden silence.*]

JOSEPH (*two steps down L.*): Why—er—he's not here just now.

MORDECAI: The best carpenter in the country! The reason I gave you boys the job was on account of him.

MARY (*to Joseph—collecting dishes on tray below table*): Don't you think you'd better tell Mordecai?

MORDECAI (*steps down L.*): Tell me what?

JOSEPH (*L. of Mordecai*): Well—er—speaking of Jesus—as a matter of fact—he's—er—he's gone away.

MORDECAI: Gone where?

JAMES: Our brother felt he had important work to do—

MORDECAI: *Important!* What's more important than my barn? It's the biggest barn in Nazareth! (*With dawning realisation*) You mean he isn't going to be on the job?

JOSEPH (*interrupts*): But we can get—

MORDECAI (*hysterically*): You've swindled me! Cheated me! I'll have you up before the authorities—(*He pauses for breath*) It's off! The deal's off! (*Starts out gate*).

JOSEPH (*after him*): But you can't do that—we've got a contract!

MORDECAI: Sue me! (*Exit—leaves gate open.*)

JOSEPH (*turning to Mary—crosses C., then up C.*): There, Mother—~~now~~ see what you've done!

MARY (*astonished—below table*): I?

SIMON (*crosses down to Mary—she pushes him up out of her way and crosses below him to gate.*) Telling hom now—before we started the job—

MARY (*stands for a moment, feeling the blame in the eyes of those around her, then steps to the gate with sudden decision. Calling*): Mordecai! Mordecai!

MORDECAI (*off*): What is it?

MARY: Come back here!

MORDECAI (*steps inside gate*): Well—

[*There is a moment's silence while the Brothers stare curiously at her, then Mary speaks to Mordecai in gate.*]

MARY: Just a moment, Mordecai! How did your agreement read?

MORDECAI (*triumphantly*): That the work should be done by four sons of the House of Joseph—

MARY: You'll still get four sons—Joseph, Simon, Judah—and James.

JAMES (*at L. bench, reading prayer book, rises—startled. Mary steps back*): Why, Mother—surely you don't expect me—

MORDECAI: A lot of strength he's got after all his prayers and fasting! I won't have it!

MARY CLEOPHAS (*rises—stands below stool R. of table*): Now, Mordecai—if a man goes to a dealer and orders four donkeys and doesn't specify four white one and three brown ones and one grey donkey are delivered, the law will hold him to the agreement.

JAMES (*stuffyly*): I don't call that a very happy comparison.

[*Before Mordecai can answer there is a clap of thunder, followed by a few drops of rain. Mordecai holds his hand out to feel the rain.*]

MORDECAI (*cross up C.*): Thunder! Never mind who comes—my grain will be spoiled! (*Joseph,*

Judah and Simon go to shop for cloaks. Mary Cleophas moves bowl of spoons to fig tree bench). Get my roof mended! Hurry, now! You too, James! (James crosses R. in protest.) Don't get huffy! (Goes off gate below Mary, who then crosses L. at once. Boys are off through gate.)

JUDAH (*calls*): Goodbye, Mother— (*then Joseph, then Simon—All are talking—leave gate open.*)

MARY (*crossing L. to Mary Cleophas*): Oh, dear, that wasn't wrong, was it? But when they all stood and looked at me—I felt we had to do something!

MARY CLEOPHAS (*crossing L. of her below table and above bench*): We did pretty well.

[*James stops on his way to gate. Mary moves to him.*]

JAMES: See here, Mother—I'll do this, even though I don't want to. It's against my principles to work on a fast day—

MARY: Thank you, James.

[*Mary Cleophas puts all wooden spoons in porridge bowl—places bowl R. end of fig tree bench—then finishes stacking tray with everything except two jugs.*]

JAMES: *But*—only on one condition—

MARY: What is it?

JAMES: If, within a reasonable length of time, Jesus doesn't give up this notion of his and come back to his job here—we must *get* him back. (*No answer from Mary*). You'll agree to that, Mother?

MARY: Yes, James.

JAMES: And you won't oppose us?

MARY: No, James. (*He puts hat on—crosses to gate. She adds hesitantly*) And I— (*James turns to her*) I appreciate your helping us out.

JAMES (*stops near gate*): And, Mother—

MARY: Yes James.

[*Mary Cleophas takes tray and goes to C. step.*]

JAMES: If the Rabbi asks for me, say I'm taking my brother's place—that I felt it my duty. (*Exits—leaves gate open.*)

MARY: Yes, James.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*on step*): Did he *mean* that about bringing Jesus back?

MARY: I suppose so. (*Crosses to table.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS: And you agreed to it?

MARY: Maybe they'll forget about it. Maybe it will all just—blow over. (*Looks up at rain—shivers*) It's a cold rain. I begged Jesus to take his warm cloak. He'll be wet through.

REBA (*comes from upstairs*): The baby's asleep. (*Wipes forehead and upper lip*) My, I'll be glad when he's weaned. Nursing makes me perspire so!

MARY: I know. Sit down and I'll come in and warm something up for you.

MARY CLEOPHAS: I'll do it. (*Exits to house.*)

NAOMI (*enters from gate—closing it—distant thunder is heard. Naomi crosses to fig tree bench and takes pitchers*) I've just been talking to Daniel's teacher—he's doing so well in school.

MARY: Of course he's way ahead of his age. (*To herself—forgetting Naomi*) If he walked all night he must be at the Sea of Galilee by now. The place feels empty without him. (*Looks at sky*) It's going to rain the whole day—(*To Naomi*) What do you say we put up some fruit? (*Mary picks up cloth and bowl of spoons*) We've all those peaches in the house—(*Both exit into house C.*)

[*Thunder—soft as Curtain falls.*]

[CURTAIN]

ACT ONE

Scene 2

A WINESHOP IN CAPERNAUM. ABOUT NOON.

The wineshop is built on a pier at one end of the Lake of Tiberius (the Sea of Galilee). The Centre part of the building is the wineshop proper with a bar, tables, stools, etc. At Right is the entrance door leading in from the porch, which extends further Right. On it are a number of empty barrels. At the end of the porch some boats are tied. Inside, at upstage Right, is a small bar, behind which are shelves full of jugs, bottles and other tavern equipment. Upstage, Left of Centre is a long table with a bench running its full length on the downstage side, so that the people sitting on it have their backs to the audience. A stove up Left. In the back wall of the inn are two small windows. Downstage Right and Left Centre are two tables with stools. In a wing of the room at Left is another small table with two stools (for the use of Mary and the Disciple). At upstage, Left of Centre portion of the inn is the entrance to the kitchen.

At rise of Curtain the seats are all full. Eben, the pedlar is displaying his wares to a Woman, down Right. Amos, a hungry-looking waiter, is waiting on the tables, while Selima, who runs the place, is busy in the bar. Selima calls to Eben.

SELIMA (*behind bar*): Eben! Any signs of the boats yet?

[*Eben steps to the door and looks out. Selima yawns. Eben turns back.*]

EBEN: There's a mist over the lake. I can't see past the shore-line.

SELIMA (*with annoyance*): The boys told me they'd be back in time for lunch. Heaven knows they made enough noise going out this morning. (*Child climbs*

on barrel) They'll have to be quieter if I'm going to spend all day and half the night on my feet running this business.

EBEN (*leans against downstage R. end bar*): Is your brother out of town again, Selima?

SELIMA (*nodding*): Gone off to Sidon— (*Amos goes to kitchen*)—and with business so heavy here, too. Of course, this rush may not last forever. What would happen to this place here if Choraizon or Bethsaida made a good offer to Jesus? (*A customer at long table calls "Selima"—Selima nods and makes out cheque. Eager to continue*) The town of Capernaum does little enough for him—and he's the biggest attraction they ever had. Suppose some other town makes an offer and off he goes? What then?

EBEN: Does he show any signs of moving on?

[*Amos come to above table L.C. with food, then to Sarah for money—and exits L.*]

SELIMA: No, but you never can tell. When he gets talking or walking you can't say when or where he'll stop. Take this morning. The boys should have been back from their fishing hours ago—but Jesus decided to go with them. If he gets to making lessons out of things they'll forget all about coming home. He may wind up on the other side of the lake and stay there! That's why I keep saying—"Sell now."

EBEN: Well—I don't know. Since things are going so well I'd stick it and take a chance.

SELIMA (*Gives check to table R.C. With a touch of scorn*): Take a chance! That's a regular man's argument. Why take chances? I said that to my brother when he talked about making our house larger. "Why go to all the extra expense?" I said. "Jesus doesn't mind where he sleeps." (*Customer at table up L. gives money to Amos, who takes order*

to Selima. Eben sits R. of long table after looking out door R. She changes to a confidential tone) I must say we never had anyone who was less trouble. (Amos to table L.C. with wine—then to bar to give Selima money) Why, we once had John the Baptist and his followers at out house and they nearly drove us crazy! (As Amos passes with a cup of wine. Selima cranes her neck to look into the cup and then halts Amos with a jerk of her head. He comes closer to her. In a whisper) Haven't I told you a dozen times not to fill the dups so full? It makes a difference of a gallon or more on a busy day. I'll measure out the next lot myself!

[Amos gives wine to table L.C. Selima exits to kitchen, followed by Amos, as Mary, accompanied by James, Joseph and Simon, come into the wineshop from up R. from L. It is obvious they have come a great distance as they have on cloaks. Mary is a little timid and has lost some of her assurance of manner as we see her in these unfamiliar surroundings, She speaks quietly but firmly.]

MARY (*to downstage post on porch*): No, James, I'll wait here.

JAMES: But, Mother—

MARY: I've come this far with you, as I said I would. But I'm not going to embarrass my son in front of a crowd of strangers. (*Adds, a little choked*) I don't see how I could be expected to.

SIMON: After all the scandalous things we've heard!

JOSEPH: There's no sense in not facing facts, Mother. He's simply out of his mind!

[Amos goes to kitchen.]

MARY: All the more reason for seeing him alone. I'm not going any farther.

SIMON: Maybe Mother's right—maybe we ought to wait and see him tonight—

JOSEPH: Then stay here with her! We're not going to wait. We came here to accomplish something and the sooner we do it the better. (*Exits up R. to L.*)

JAMES (*to Mary*): Don't you see, Mother—he's making himself and us ridiculous. It's time someone took him in hand. (*Simon tries to stop him. After a pause*) It's for his own good as well as ours—

MARY: Yes, James.

JAMES (*after a pause*): Well— (*Crosses Simon to go—turns*) we're going. (*James goes off up R. to L. above Simon.*)

[*Simon stands irresolutely for a moment, then as he sees they are really going without him, turns to Mary.*]

SIMON: You're sure you'll be all right here alone, Mother?

MARY (*with a little ironic smile—starts to cross to L.*): Yes, Simon.

[*Simon hurries after his two brothers while Mary looks around for a place to sit. It is quite crowded and there is only one vacant seat at a table for two, at table down L. Before she can take it Disciple enters from kitchen and takes it—she remains up Centre R. Mathias comes in upper L. James and Mathias meet outside at L. window. Simon and Mathias meet in up R. corner. Selima follows disciple on and sees Mathias enter R. He crosses below R.C. table—she meets him there. Selima brushes by without even noticing Mary.*]

MATHIAS: Selima!

SELIMA: Well Mathias— (*Crosses to him—L. of R.C. table*) Welcome to Capernaum. When did you leave Sidon—and how is your family? (*As Selima speaks she casts a quick glance around the room, seeking a place to seat him. There is no vacant seat, but Customer nearly finished at L.C. table—L. of it. To*

Customer) You don't mind giving up your seat, do you? You've nearly finished and Mathias has come a long way. (*Customer hesitates, but Selima has him by the elbow and half up before he can protest*) Here you are. (*Above L.C. table. She clears the table briskly*) What brought you here this time?

[*While Selima is busy seating Mathias the Customer who has been ousted from the seat grumbles to the Man at the kitchen door as he stands eating from his plate. At the same time, Woman who has been sitting at table beside the Disciple, who is writing, gets up, crosses and sits down R. of L.C. table. Mary looks questioningly at Customer who was ousted. With his mouth full he pantomimes, to Mary—"You take it." Mary sits down R. of the Disciple at the table down L. The table is well downstage and Mary faces the audience.*]

MATHIAS (*puts bag down stage against L.C. table—settling himself in his seat*): A load of goods to sell—(*Woman rises and leaves table L.C.*) since they tell me everyone has so much money around here. And I've brought a fine appetite with me, too. How about a nice piece of fish? I've been travelling inland for the past month.

SELIMA (*calling to servant*): Amos! A bowl of hot bean soup to warm your stomach while you're waiting?

MATHIAS: Fine!

[*Amos enters from kitchen with tray and food for Disciple. Selima then calls him and puts soiled dishes from L.C. table on his tray.*]

SELIMA (*calling to servant*): Amos! A bowl of hot bean soup for Mathias.

[*As Amos goes toward kitchen Mary stops him and gives an order.*]

MARY (*to Amos*): I'd like a bowl of that soup, too—if I could—and some bread.

[*Customer goes off R.; talks to Child. Mary sits quietly listening to Selima and Mathias, shrinking back a little in her seat.*]

MATHIAS: How are the fish running, Selima?

[*Customer at table up L. exits R. Eben goes up to bar.*]

SELIMA (*above L.C. table*): Better than in years.

MATHIAS: Do you think this man Jesus has anything to do with it?

[*A Woman starts on from up L. Customer goes to up R.—they meet—she says to him "The boats are in" and he returns to R. door.*]

SELIMA: Do I think so? I should say he has! The old prophets used to pray and hope for God to do the rest. But do you know what this man does? He goes out and takes a hand at the nets. Like this morning. Whenever he pulls, the nets are always full. We only hope the price of fish keeps up.

[*There is a commotion at the front door.*]

CUSTOMER (*who left—sticks head in door R.*): The boats are in!

[*Customer and Woman exit R.—Child follows. A Woman exits R.—meets Fisherman up R.; after her goes Eben. Two Customers at table up L. rise and look out window up L. Man exits R. to up R. corner. Woman and Eben go off up R. to L. Customers at up L. window return to places. Man returns to below bar.*]

SELIMA (*to Mathias*): Good—you'll be having your fish in less than no time.

FISHERMAN (*comes through the crowd at the door R., carrying a huge fish. Below table R.C.*): Here's a beauty, Selima.

SELIMA: Take it into the kitchen and tell the cook to give you a bowl of soup. (*Crosses L. of Mathias*) Where are the boys? Are they coming in here to eat?

FISHERMAN: They're not hungry. (*Excitedly. Almost in kitchen door, turns*) We had a fine catch! Enough for hundreds of people! (*Exits to the kitchen.*)

[*Mary listens to this and follows the Fisherman with her eyes as he exits.*]

SELIMA (*proudly*): See? What did I tell you?

MATHIAS (*impressed*): I'd like to meet this man myself. Where can I find him?

SELIMA: He'll be preaching—

[*Amos enters from kitchen with soup and wine for Mathias and Mary—serves Mathias first, then Mary—then up R. to Customer to give him wine.*]

SELIMA: But you'd better get there early if you want to hear anything. Otherwise, you'll get caught in a tangle of beds and stretchers.

MATHIAS: Beds and stretchers?

SELIMA: Cripples and invalids—they all go to him.

MATHIAS: And he cures them?

[*Amos goes to Mary.*]

SELIMA (*above table L.C.*): Certainly! And he's going to teach my boys how to do it, too. (*Two Customers sit R. of L.C. table. Amos gives wine to one of them*) Then send them out by themselves. (*Look from Mathias*) I don't see why they shouldn't be able to—once they've been shown how.

MATHIAS: But won't that take the crowds away from here, if people can stay home and see miracles performed right on their own doorsteps?

SELIMA: That's what I keep telling my brother. If they move on—where are *we*?

[*Amos exits to kitchen.*]

MATHIAS (*a bit too eagerly*): You don't happen to know where Jesus might be going next?

SELIMA (*draws back*): I didn't say he was going anywhere. (*She pauses. To Mathias*). I'd better be seeing about your fish. (*She starts away, crosses L. and stops at R. of table before Mary and the Disciple and speaks patronizingly*) How's the soup?

MARY (*timidly*): The soup is all right—

SELIMA (*aggressively*): What's the matter with it?

MARY: It—it seems a bit thin—

SELIMA: You've got a country taste, if you don't mind my saying so. All city people prefer thin soup. (*Takes in her plain apparel*) I suppose you've come here to see our Jesus?

MARY: Yes—I have—

SELIMA (*talking partly for Mathias' benefit*): Well, you've come to the right person if you want to get in touch with him, I can arrange it.

MARY (*impressed*): You *can*?

SELIMA: You see—my two sons are with Jesus, and we think the world of him and he thinks the world of us. I suppose you have some sons? (*Mary nods—Selima rattles on*) Then I'm sure you will agree with me it's very important for a man's future to have people like him. The *right* people.

MATHIAS (*banging on table*): Look here! What about my fish!

[*A customer from table R.C. crosses to below bar, leans across it playing with game. Mathias removes hat and puts it on bag—below table.*]

SELIMA (*pats his shoulder*): By the time you finish your soup it'll be here. (*To Mary*) You'll excuse me? (*She exits into kitchen.*)

[*Disciple, who has been apparently absorbed in his manuscript, looks up, meets Mary's rather bewildered gaze, and smiles.*]

MARY (*a little wistful*): Does she really know so much about him?

DISCIPLE (*a little humorously*): Well, naturally, her sons being with him, she knows a little more than most people—but not so much as she pretends.

[*Amos enters from kitchen; crosses to bar to tend it. Mathias starts to write. Pause.*]

MARY: It's been wonderful to sit here and listen to all these things about him.

DISCIPLE (*curiously*): If you're so interested, why don't you join the crowds and listen to *him*?

MARY (*confused*): I'm waiting for someone. Besides, crowds frighten me a little.

DISCIPLE: It's always like this. You'll never get a chance to see him alone.

[*Mathias begins to listen.*]

MARY (*drawing him out*): And they all believe in him? They all think him wonderful?

[*A Customer from table up L. goes to below bar, talks to Amos and other Customer.*]

DISCIPLE (*with glowing faith*): For *me*—he's the beginning and the end.

[*Mathias turns down L. to listen.*]

MARY: Oh, I didn't mean *I* had any doubts about his being wonderful. I only meant—did the *people* think so—

DISCIPLE (*simply*): I can only speak for myself. I would *die* for him.

MARY: What does he *do*—that makes everyone follow him?

DISCIPLE: Oh, nothing that I can explain. (*Searches for words*) He just sits out on a hillside—or in a field—and talks to people. And when they go away—they feel better.

MATHIAS (*who has been listening intently between gulps of soup, gets up and comes down to R. of Mary*): Excuse me—but I couldn't help hearing what you were saying. Perhaps you can give me some information I want.

DISCIPLE: Well—I don't know—

MATHIAS: Do you know anyone who has real influence with this man Jesus? One of his disciples?

DISCIPLE (*simply*): I'm one of his disciples.

[*Mary looks at him with added interest.*]

MATHIAS (*eagerly*): Well, (*crosses to close above Disciple*): I've got a proposition I want to make to you. (*He looks towards the kitchen and then hurries on*)

If you can get Jesus to leave this town and come to Sidon I'll guarantee him all reasonable expenses—a salary for six months—and a nice bonus besides!

DISCIPLE (*indignantly*): No one would dare to go to him with a proposition like that.

[*Selima enters from kitchen with Mathias' fish and stands listening just above Mathias' chair at L.C. table.*]

MATHIAS: Why not? It's perfectly sound, I'm a respectable business man—my word's as good as my bond.

DISCIPLE (*rises*): He wouldn't be interested.

MATHIAS: Nonsense! (*Touches Disciple's arm—he pulls away*) Everyone's interested in a good business deal. (*Lowering his voice*) If you could help me, I'd make it worth your while. How much? Come now—every man has his price—(*Disciple pulls away. Selima bangs fish down on L.C. table. Mathias hears bang. He straightens up, greatly confused, and fumbles for a pepper grinder on table down L.*) Just borrowing the pepper—(*Returns to L.C. table.*)

SELIMA (*above table—indicating the fish*): How do you know it's going to need pepper when you

haven't tasted it yet? No, Mathias— (*Two Customers go off up R.*) I was standing right behind you—I heard every word you said. And I know what you're up to! You've got your eye on Jesus and the business he brings. Well, let me tell you one thing—neither you nor anyone else is going to get that business away from here until we're good and ready to let it go!

MATHIAS: It seems to me you're taking a lot on yourself—

SELIMA (*R. of L.C. table*): Not any more than's been given me. You seem to forget that my sons—

MATHIAS: Please, Selima—don't tell us about your sons again! And as to business—Jesus isn't going to spend the rest of his life here, is he? And when he does move on, he can move in *my* direction, can't he? (*He adds slyly*) I might need a smart woman to run the place—someone who knows how to handle the crowds. (*He looks at the fish*) And feed them right. (*Mathias sits L. of L.C. table. Resumes pleasantly*) How about my eating that fish while it's nice and hot? (*Amos takes order from table R.C.; exits to kitchen*) There's no one can do a fish as well as you can, Selima. Your brother's a lucky man. I hope he gives you a good cut of the profits.

SELIMA: Not what he ought to—

MATHIAS (*mildly*): You don't say that? Well, that's what comes of doing business with relatives. (*Takes mouthful of fish*) My—my—what a fish! And what a sauce!

SELIMA: I thought maybe it might need just a scrap more lemon—

MATHIAS (*his mouth full*): Not a thing—perfect! (*Customer at table up L. rises—calls Selima. Two Men start from off up L.; get on stage R. before "even when he's angry." Mathias lowers his voice*) And what a sauce! (*He smiles up at Selima, who melts.*)

[*Selima crosses to bar to take money from Customer at up L. table who pays and exits R. Disciple smiles a little—while Mary looks distressed.*]

DISCIPLE: Don't look so upset. These things happen all the time.

MARY: But what does Jesus think of it? Doesn't it make him angry?

DISCIPLE: He knows how people are. How they have to struggle to make a living. He doesn't expect to change human nature over night. (*A Customer goes to chair up L. Another Customer to long table up L.*) Mind you—if anyone came to him *direct* with a proposition like that—(*he laughs*)—well, they wouldn't forget it in a hurry! But, even while he was angry, he'd understand—and make excuses for them.

MARY (*smiling*): Yes—that sounds like him, just like him.

MATHIAS: Some wine, here—

[*Selima starts to pour it from a jug of watered wine, then decides he is a good customer and takes special jug—brings good wine to table, pours, urges him to taste it.*]

MARY: I remember once when one of his brothers tried to drive a sharp bargain—

DISCIPLE: His brothers? Then you know the family—you must come from Nazareth. Do you know Jesus, too?

MARY: I know him very well. You see—he's my son.

DISCIPLE: Your son! (*Looks at Mary intently*) Why, you know—there is a resemblance. (*Mary raises her hands in a little gesture of deprecation*) And when you smile! (*Mathias tastes wine*) It's quite like him!

SELIMA (*above Mathias turns as she hears this. Crosses below Mathias to down R. of Mary*) Quite like who?

DISCIPLE (*With innocent malice*): Like "our Jesus." There's such a resemblance between them—

SELIMA: I don't see it! And certainly no one knows him better than I do— (*Turns R. to look at Mathias.*)

DISCIPLE (*quietly*): This lady is his mother.

[*There is a dead silence. Selima gulps, then struggles toward recovery. She flashes a guilty look in the direction of Mathias and then plunges in garrulously.*]

SELIMA (*in a low voice*): Oh, well—if you're his mother—you can understand why I was so upset just now. (*Amos comes from kitchen to take orders from table up L.*) You've no idea how hard I work trying to protect him, just like he was my own son! The way people take advantage of him and try to use him—I don't know what he'd do if someone like me didn't step in and— (*Calls to Amos, who crosses to her*) Amos, a little service here. Bring a portion of that fresh fish—tell the cook to have it piping hot. No, never mind—I'll go and fix it myself—then I know it'll be right. (*She bustles off to the kitchen. Amos follows her off.*)

DISCIPLE (*smiling*): Did you see her face when I said, "This lady is his mother"?

MARY: I shouldn't have let you do it. (*Smiles a little*) But I *was* getting a little tired of hearing her go on as if he belonged to her! (*She pauses*) I can't tell you how glad I am I came here! (*After another pause, she adds*) Wait until I tell my sons what people think of him.

DISCIPLE: Your sons came with you?

[*Fisherman enters from kitchen to stop below table up L. to talk with Customers, Eben enters up R. from L. with pack and puts it down, down R. on porch, then crosses to bar. Customer from table R.C. crosses to bar.*]

MARY: Yes! All but my youngest son, Judah. He's

away working in the country. He's going to get married. But he wouldn't have come with us even if he'd been home. *He* believes in Jesus—

DISCIPLE (*startled*): Don't the others?

MARY (*after a pause*): Perhaps I shouldn't tell you this—still, you're one of his friends. (*In a lower voice*) You see, when Jesus left home, his brothers weren't in sympathy with him at all.

DISCIPLE: You don't mean it!

MARY: Well, you know how families are. Then, to make things worse, we began to hear stories—from pedlars and salesmen travelling through— (*Eben and Customer at bar take dice—sit off R. on porch until Curtain*) and finally the Rabbi himself came to see us. Well, from what the boys heard they thought he'd gone out of his mind. So nothing would do but they had to come here to take him in hand.

DISCIPLE: You mean— (*Fisherman sits R. of table up L.*) have him give up his work? (*Mary nods*) But that's impossible!

MARY: Oh, I wasn't in favour of it. That's why I came along. I didn't know what they might do without me. But now I can tell them a few things— (*Sees her Sons pass up R. window*) There they are now! (*She turns toward the R. door*) Oh, dear, I hope they haven't done anything foolish! (*She rises.*)

[*James, Joseph and Simon enter. They look disgruntled, particularly James. James sees Mary—crosses down below R.C. table, puts his hat on table. Joseph and Simon give the crowded shop a quickly appraising look.*]

JAMES: Mother!

MARY (*enthusiastically—crosses down stage to James*): Wait until you hear what I've got to tell you. I wish you could have heard it all for yourselves—the most wonderful things! You'll be so proud—

JAMES (*furiously*): Yes? Well, we've got something to tell *you*.

MARY: Why, what's the matter? Didn't you see him?

SIMON (*Crosses down R. of James, Joseph above L. of James*): We couldn't get close for the crowd.

JOSEPH: But we sent a message to him.

MARY (*Mathias crosses up to L. of L. table—stands talking to Fisherman. Apprehensively*): What sort of message?

JAMES: We said simply, "Your mother and brothers are here and want to see you." And what sort of answer do you think he sent back—by one of those common fishermen?

MARY: I don't know.

JAMES: "*Who* is my mother—and *who* are my brothers?"

MARY (*incredulously*): He said *what*?

JAMES (*enjoying repeating it*): He said, "*Who* is my mother—and *who* are my brothers?"

MARY (*in a half whisper*): Oh, no!

JAMES (*his voice rising*): Ask Joseph here—

MARY: Ssh—not so loud!

JOSEPH (*lower voice—leans forward Mary*): That's what he said, Mother. (*Pause*) A fine message to send to his own flesh and blood!

MARY: Did anyone hear him?

JAMES (*with a short laugh*): Only about three thousand people! (*Pause.*)

MARY: Oh, there must be some explanation! He wouldn't do a thing like that for no reason!

JAMES: You always make excuses for him. (*Starts to cross up—Mary stops him.*)

MARY: Is that *all* he said? Just—"Who is my mother—and who are my brothers?" (*Stumbles over words.*)

SIMON: Oh, no—

JAMES: As if that wasn't bad enough, he went on and made it worse.

MARY (*apprehensively*) *Worse?*

JAMES: There were people on all sides of him. You couldn't move edgeways—and what do you think he said, Mother? After he got our message he looked around at all of them and said, "*You are my mother and you are my brothers!*" To *them*, mind you! To that ignorant crowd!

MARY (*a complete change of mood*): But that changes everything! Why didn't you tell me that in the first place? Frightening me like this and making me think he didn't want to see me! With all those people listening he used our message to make a lesson of! That's the way he teaches. Don't you see?

JAMES: No, I don't see!

MARY (*her voice rising*): But, James! That message wasn't for us—it was for the people who were listening. He was trying to tell them that because they followed him and his teachings—*they* were his brothers and sisters—his mother, too!

SIMON (*steps down R. of James*): But, Mother—you don't understand.

MARY (*continuing without lowering her voice*): This thing about all men being brothers—why, he's said it to me hundreds of times! That's one of the things he believes in most! You'll see, when he's (*Grosses up to tables*) through talking to the crowd, he'll come here looking for us. And you ought to be glad you didn't get to him. What would you have said in front of all those people? "We want you to come home? We want you to come back and help us mend roofs and barns? We think you're out of your mind?"

SIMON (*timidly*): I must say he seems to be doing well.

MARY: Doing well? Look at the crowds—that ought to tell you something.

JOSEPH: I'd like a chance to air my views and have a crowd follow me.

MARY (*her voice rising as she points to Mathias*): Why, an important man from Sidon was trying to get Jesus to come to his town—but the people here won't let him go. (*Her eyes fall on the Disciple as she speaks*) And you should have heard what that young man—over there thinks of him! He thinks the sun rises and sets in him. He said he'd die for him! (*Mary crosses to Disciple, who crosses below his table to Mary*) I'd like you to meet my sons—(*Crosses C. Disciple follows—she turns to him. She pauses, then realises she can't make the introduction and adds*) Oh, I'm sorry—I'm afraid I don't know your name—

DISCIPLE: Judas, Judas Iscariot.

[*The Curtain begins to descend slowly as Mary introduces her sons.*]

MARY (*her L. hand on Disciple's arm*): This is James—and Simon—and Joseph—

[*Each steps forward as name is spoken.*]

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene I

THE HOUSE IN NAZARETH. ONE YEAR LATER.

The large table is Right Centre, with bench below it and stool right of it; other bench up Left.

In bright sunlight, Reba is taking freshly washed and dried sheets from the wall at background. Naomi is seated under the fig tree up Left, shelling a pan of peas. They are laughing at rise of curtain.

REBA (*folding a sheet above R. C. table*): I never saw her so excited before—

NAOMI (*L. under tree*): You'd be, too, if it was *your* son. (*Reba almost drops sheet*) I know how I'd feel if Daniel—but you're as excited as she is.

REBA (*laughing*): Of course I am! And you are, too. Nothing like this ever happened to us before. (*Crosses to wall R. for sheet and line.*)

NAOMI (*interrupting*): If only the boys get home—
MARY (*off up L.*): Naomi, Naomi, dear! Have you finished shelling those peas?

NAOMI (*answering*): Almost. (*She turns to Reba*) Do you know, my fingers are all thumbs today—I'm so nervous!

MARY (*off*): And Reba! Are the sheets dry yet?

REBA (*answering*): I'm just folding them.

MARY: Then put them in the lavender chest for a few minutes before you spread them on his bed. (*Mary comes to house doorway and stands there for a moment*) Have Joseph and Simon come back yet?

NAOMI: Not yet.

MARY (*on step C.*): They would be late on a day like this! Be sure and call me the moment they come. I want to tell them the news myself, I've got to watch that young lamb I'm roasting.

[*She exits into house C.*]

REBA: She wouldn't trust *me* with it. I don't suppose she'll let anyone else cook for him all the time he's here.

[*She finishes sheets and goes up L. steps to collect washing.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS (*Enters from gate with a covered basket of chickens. Leaves gate open—stops between gate and upper side of table*): Whenever there's anything important to do, all the men around here disappear; Joseph—Simon—where are they?

NAOMI: They haven't come back from the country yet.

MARY CLEOPHAS: I thought they were coming home last night. And James? Where is he? Meditating, I suppose! Can you imagine—I had to go all the way to the market to find someone to kill these chickens? Where's Mary?

[*Puts chickens on table down R. corner.*]

REBA: Inside—roasting a lamb.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Standing ove a hot fire on a day like this! But I can't blame her. You should have heard all the things they're saying in the market place.

REBA (*crossing to L. of table—starts gathering linen*): Are they excited?

MARY CLEOPHAS (*folds tablecloths—piles them on down Right corner of table*): Excited! That isn't the word! If you only knew the plans that are being made! It's the first time in all my years in Nazareth that I ever knew them to make such a fuss over the return of one of their own people.

REBA: It's a big honour for us, isn't it?

MARY CLEOPHAS: I should say it is! People spoke to me in the street who never looked at me before! And there were one or two I enjoyed snubbing! (*Reba finishes folding linens and starts in the house*)

with them. Mary Cleophas hands her the chickens)
Here, take these in when you go and get Mary away from that hot stove— (*Reba crosses up L.; stops above Mary. Mary Cleophas pauses as Mary comes out*) Oh, there you are!

MARY (*Mary is shaken out of her usual efficiency and stands uncertainly, speaking half to the others, half to herself*) I know I have forgotten something! Clean linen, water for the bedrooms, new wicks for the lamps—and I've my bread still to bake. Oh, yes— (*Stops Reba*) Reba, get out my best hand towels— with the blue embroidery—and put them in his room. (*Reba exits to house*) And let me see— what else? Oh, dear—I must think!

NAOMI (*rises with one bowl—peas shelled. Affectionately, to Mary Cleophas*) She's been going on like this for hours! (*To Mary*) Now, don't worry, Mother. Everything's going to be lovely. And, Auntie—you stay here and keep her from getting too excited.

[*She exits to house.*]

MARY (*to Mary Cleophas*): Coming home! I just can't believe it! Coming home!

MARY CLEOPHAS (*above table folding towels*): If you don't sit down and rest a minute you won't be fit to see him when he gets here.

MARY (*L. end of bench below table*): I was never so happy in all my life! (*Mary Cleophas crosses down L. of her*) When I think how I worried about him. The nights I've lain awake wondering if he was cold or hungry or—or *safe* even. (*Sits*) And now he's coming home! And not just coming, either. But *invited*! (*Pause*) Has—has anyone said anything about it in town?

MARY CLEOPHAS: Anyone? You're joking, Mary! Why, no one talks of anything else.

MARY: But we only knew it this morning—

MARY CLEOPHAS: They're certainly rushing to get ready for him! (*Crosses below Mary to gate*) You should see the streets and the food-shops! And the strangers that are here in Town already! (*Closes gate*) There won't be an empty bed in any of the inns by nightfall. (*Turns to down R. of Mary*) People are coming in from the seacoast, too.

MARY (*happily*): And all to see my son!

MARY CLEOPHAS (*sits on bench R. of Mary*): I don't suppose there's a mother in Nazareth that doesn't envy you, Mary. •

MARY: If only Judah were home—how he'd love to see his brother! Still, if things go here anything like they did at Capernaum, they'll never let him get away. You know, I'm trying so hard to be calm—to look calm, anyway—and then I suddenly remember the way he smiles and the way he speaks—and realise that I'll be actually seeing him—with my own eyes—today! And my heart just turns over!

MARY CLEOPHAS: It's—it's been pretty hard for you, hasn't it?

MARY: Oh, I don't mean to complain. Other people need him. And, after all, I had thirty years. (*Pause*) I hope there won't be too many people around *all* the time. I'd—I'd like to have him to myself for a while. At first, anyway.

MARY CLEOPHAS: You haven't a chance. The house will be full of people who never knew we existed before!

HEPZIBAH (*outside the gate*): Mary—Naomi!

MARY CLEOPHAS (*rises*): There's one now! (*Crosses to gate.*)

HEPZIBAH: Will someone open the gate—my hands are full.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*opens gate—stands above it*): Well, Hepzibah. What have you got there? (*Closes gate.*)

HEPZIBAH (*Hepzibah enters courtyard with a stack of dishes. She is a large, voluble, middle-aged woman*

of dubious sincerity): I just *had* to run in for a minute. (*Crosses below Mary Cleophas toward table*) I know how busy you are, with your boy coming home. Isn't it wonderful to have a son who's such a success? (*Puts plates in Mary Cleophas's hands.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*few steps C. from gate*): What am I supposed to do with these?

HEPZIBAH (*below R. end stool at table—ignoring this and speaking to Mary*): I thought you might need a few extra dishes— (*Mary Cleophas crosses L. to above table*) if you don't mind my being a little neighbourly. There will be so many people coming—(*Examining cloths on table*) I've got some fine tablecloths, too—you're bound to run short.

MARY (*pleased*): Oh, thank you, Hepzibah. We *have* enough linen—but I'll be glad of the extra dishes.

HEPZIBAH (*between stool and table. Rattling on*): Have you got all the chickens you need? (*Mary Cleophas slams dishes on table*) They tell me the market is sold out. But I don't suppose that should worry you. From what I hear, your son can feed as many people as come to him hungry. It must be wonderful having a boy like that.

MARY (*again trying not to be proud*): I'm glad everyone says fine things about him.

HEPZIBAH: Fine things! (*Sits R. end of bench below table*): You needn't be so modest, Mary. Not with an old friend. If he was *my* son, I'd be shouting from the housetops!

MARY CLEOPHAS (*above table examining plates*): I can believe that!

HEPZIBAH (*gives her a look—moves closer to Mary*): Do you suppose, after he's settled and you've had time to visit together, I could drop in one day? He will be staying here, won't he?

MARY: Where else would he stay?

HEPZIBAH (*a little confused*): I just thought some prominent people might want to entertain him.

Still this *is* his home. (*Look at Mary Cleophas. Pause*) Well, (*rises—crosses R.*) if there's anything else you want, just ask for it. It'll be a pleasure—

MARY: Thank you, Hepzibah.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Goodbye—

HEPZIBAH: Goodbye— (*Exits gate—closes gate.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*putting dishes down with a clatter, Mary puts towels on table*): I never could abide that woman!

MARY: Still, it *was* nice of her to bring the dishes—

[*James enters from stairs L.*]

REBA (*runs on from house*): All the chickens are on the spits—

NAOMI (*shouts from house*): Ask Mother if I should put butter in the peas now or later—

REBA (*also shouts*): Naomi wants to know if she should—

MARY CLEOPHAS (*interrupting—motions “we can hear”—hands her dishes*): Later.

[*Reba exits into house with plates. Mary Cleophas L. above table. Mary puts folded towel on table.*]

JAMES (*on 3rd and 4th step—annoyed by the atmosphere*): What's all the excitement? I spend a few hours in quiet meditation and come back to find everyone racing about and shouting—

MARY: Oh, James—haven't you heard?

MARY CLEOPHAS (*crosses down C. between Mary and James*): Your brother's coming home today!

JAMES: Judah?

MARY CLEOPHAS: No, no! Not Judah! Your brother Jesus!

JAMES (*his face darkening*): What's he coming *here* for? Had enough of his fishermen and tramps!

MARY CLEOPHAS: I must say, James—you're never a disappointment! One can always count on *you* being disagreeable! (*Turns up to L. of table.*)

MARY (*with quiet dignity*): Jesus is coming back—by special invitation—to preach in the Synagogue.

JAMES (*crossing at L. of R.C. bench*): Mother! Who's been filling your head with ideas like that?

MARY (*rises. Hurt—her voice a little unsteady*): Go and ask Rabbi Samuel if it isn't so. He told Mary Cleophas himself, didn't he? It will be a big event—(*Her voice trails off.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*crosses to James*): The whole town knows it. Walk out and ask the first man in the street. Live in *this* world, James!

JAMES (*without conviction*): I don't believe it! (*Pause*) But I'll soon find out. (*Crosses down toward R. Sees Brothers; steps back while they enter gate.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*to Mary*): That's taken the wind out of his sails!

MARY (*to Mary Cleophas*): I might have known that something like this would happen to spoil things. (*Mary Cleophas sits under fig tree. Mary turns to James, who stops near gate, suddenly indignant. Simon and Joseph, with their tools and bundles, enter as she speaks. James stops to listen.*) And I'm not going to have it! This is his first visit home. He's been invited back here as an honoured guest—and if the town can treat him that way, I think his own brother might do as much. (*James exits gate, above Brothers. Joseph closes gate at once. She sees Simon and Joseph*) Come here, Simon! (*Simon to below stool*) And you too, Joseph! (*Joseph to R. of Simon*) You heard what I said just now to James? I mean that for you, as well! I want peace and quiet in this house while Jesus is here—and I mean to have it! JOSEPH (*crosses below Simon to Mary*): But, Mother, *we're delighted!* We heard the good news as we came through town and hurried home to be the first to tell you.

SIMON (*moves down R. behind Joseph*): It's fine! He'll be honoured by the whole community!

JOSEPH: He'll make this place famous! We're proud of our brother, aren't we, Simon?

SIMON: I should say we are!

MARY (*after a pause*): So—you're proud, are you? It's all right now, what he says and does?

SIMON: Of course, Mother!

JOSEPH (*heartily*): Of course it's all right! Why, everybody believes in him—they're making tremendous plans for Sunday. (*Suddenly to Simon*) Say, they might call on us for a word, or two!

SIMON (*both pleased and alarmed*): What'll we say if they do?

JOSEPH: Oh, just something about how honoured we are— (*Joseph and Simon start up for shop*) our brother's worth at last being recognised by his home town— (*Stops*) and that Nazareth's chief claim to fame may be that he was born here. (*Walking towards shop*) And then use that to lead into something about ourselves—and our business here— (*Simon and Joseph exit to carpenter shop with their tools, very pleased with themselves at the prospect of their coming prominence.*)

MARY (*below table at R. end*): So it's all right now—since everyone believes in him—

MARY CLEOPHAS: Well, that's one thing off your mind. You know how they'll behave. I think I'd have had more respect for them if they'd stuck to their honest opinions, like James. (*She sighs.*)

REBA (*off in house*): Mother! Oh, Mother! Will you come here?

MARY: What did I tell you? I said you couldn't trust those girls to cook a lamb if there's any excitement! (*Mary crosses up to Mary Cleophas*) A chicken, yes—but a lamb! I'll have to do it myself. (*As she starts to exit, Mary Cleophas takes her hand.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS: Happy, aren't you?

MARY: I feel that I'm asleep—that I'm dreaming—and I'll suddenly awake and find he isn't coming.

Oh, dear! I *am* happy! And I mustn't cry—or my eyes will be a sight—

REBA (*off in house*): Mother!

MARY: I'm coming, Reba! (*She hurries into house. Joseph comes on from shop—crosses toward house when Mary Cleophas speaks.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*as Joseph puts on vest—then rolls sleeves down*): Well, Joseph, you just got back from that job in time.

JOSEPH (*below house step, putting on vest*): A piece of sheer luck. Simon wanted to come home by way of Choraizon and see Judah and get some first-hand news of him for Mother. But I'd lined up a big job here— (*Adds importantly*) with the Romans—

[*Simon enters from shop.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS: Doing business with the *Romans*? James will never agree to it!

SIMON (*coming from shop*): That's just what I said! After all, it *is* a big departure.

JOSEPH (*angrily*): If James want to run the shop, let him come and work in it! *You* can do as you like—but when Appius Hadrian comes I'm going through with the deal!

SIMON (*anxiously—crossing to Joseph*): I'm not opposing you, Joseph. I'm just trying to tell you not to count too much on it until you see what James says.

JOSEPH (*to Mary Cleophas*): Do something for us, Aunt Mary—try to keep James out of the way while the Roman's here—

MARY CLEOPHAS: He's not coming *today*, is he?

JOSEPH: I can't help it! I made the appointment before I knew anything about Jesus coming home— (*Knock at gate*) If that's *him*, Simon—agree with what I say— (*Goes to gate.*)

[On knock—Simon to above R. end table, Joseph opens gate.]

MARY CLEOPHAS: That's easy. Simon spends his life agreeing with everybody. (*Rises.*)

[Joseph opens the gate and stands above it, and Appius Hadrian, a rather resplendent Roman, steps in. He raises his right hand in the old Roman salute.]

APPIUS HADRIAN: Hail, Cæsar!

JOSEPH (*above gate—clumsily repeating gesture*): Hail, Roman! (*He looks at Simon, who makes a feeble gesture and mumbles something. Shuts gate; crosses R. of stool after Simon's salute.*)

[Mary Cleophas chooses this moment to blow her nose with a trumpet-like sound. Hadrian starts and looks. Mary Cleophas returns his look coolly and goes into shop.]

HADRIAN (*crosses below table, puts helmet on up stage L. end of table—takes fig from basket*): Well, come to any decision?

JOSEPH: I've been talking it over with my brother here. He's *very* enthusiastic, aren't you, Simon?

SIMON (*amiably*): Yes—yes, indeed. (*Reba comes out of house. Crosses down to go upstairs L.*)

HADRIAN (*watches her from C. Crossing to fig basket*): When you get up here in the hill country you see better legs on the women. (*His hand curves—turns to Joseph*) Who's the girl?

[Mary Cleophas comes out of shop with basket of chips in time to hear this and pauses near Simon.]

JOSEPH (*half flattered, half annoyed*): My wife.

HADRIAN: Oh! (*Sits under fig tree.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*in hoarse whisper to Simon*): That's Roman culture for you! Legs! (*Crosses and exits into house.*)

HADRIAN: The best figs I've had in Nazareth.

SIMON: My father planted that tree.

JOSEPH (*step to table*): We'd be very glad to let you have a basket of them—

HADRIAN (*spitting out a stem*): Send them to my house. (*Throughout this scene Hadrian eats figs and spits out stems.*)

JOSEPH (*crosses below table to sit R. end of bench—Simon above L. end*): Now, about the crosses—there're one or two little points to be cleared up. First, how many would you 'need'?

HADRIAN: Oh, about three a week. That's— (*Spits out another stem.*)

JOSEPH (*adding quickly*): A hundred and fifty-six a year.

HADRIAN: Better say a hundred and fifty. Call it three a week for fifty weeks. (*Joseph and Simon exchange pleased glances, then Simon looks fearfully behind him to see if anyone is coming out of the house*) But understand—sound timber, and according to specifications. We had trouble with one contractor last year. A number of his crosses broke in the joins and spoiled the show.

JOSEPH: You won't find that trouble with us. My father was an expert on joins. He always said, "If the join is good, the job is good." (*He pauses*) And the price?

HADRIAN: I'm figuring in the fees and taxes with the price—

SIMON: More fees? (*Joseph stops him with a snap of his fingers*) We pay so many—

HADRIAN: You'll pay more before long. It takes money to administer the country. To give you a strong government, police, army, navy—costs a pretty penny. (*Rises—crosses to Simon, who rises and backs away*) What's fairer than you should pay for what you get? (*Sits on table down stage side.*)

SIMON (*backs off to upper R. end of table. Intimidated*): Of course. That's right.

JOSEPH: Simon—please don't interrupt!

HADRIAN (*figures on pad with pencil*): Ten per cent for my office—ten per cent. for the Public Works office in Jerusalem—eight per cent for the—

NAOMI (*comes from house and calls up towards rooftop L.*): Reba! Reba! Don't stay up there all day! Mother needs you in the kitchen! (*Sees Simon. Voice fades off.*)

[*Simon motions Naomi to be quiet. Hadrian catches him.*]

REBA (*answering*): Coming right down!

[*Naomi exits into house and Reba starts running downstairs. Waves to Joseph as she runs past into the house. Hadrian has lost track of his figuring—looking after her.*]

JOSEPH: We're a little excited today. Our brother's coming home—

SIMON: And he's the best carpenter in the whole country!

HADRIAN (*Simon leans over his shoulder from above table*): Let me see—where was I? Oh, yes—eight per cent for the Department of Administration—four per cent to the Department of Justice—and twelve per cent to the Department of Public Amusements—then the inspectors— (*James comes through gate, unnoticed; closes it*) and local tithes—makes fifty-four per cent—

JOSEPH (*paces downstage*): I tell you I'm going ahead and if James doesn't like it—it's just too bad— (*Simon taps Joseph's shoulder to stop him. Joseph is suddenly aware that James is listening and turns, seeing him. Joseph crosses to James, above him; is very conciliatory in tone*) Ah, James, we were just speaking of you. This gentleman is Appius Hadrian.

He's making us a very interesting proposition—
(*Hadrian nods to James. James ignores Joseph, and strides towards Hadrian to R. of table, L. Joseph talking as they go*) —one that we can't afford to let slip. Can we, Simon?

SIMON: No, indeed, James. It's—

JAMES (*R. of table—to Hadrian*): We don't do business with foreigners.

HADRIAN (*stops figuring*): This is a *Roman* province. And wherever the *Romans* are the other people are the foreigners. (*Puts notes away and takes fig.*)

JAMES (*ignoring this*): In my elder brother's absence I am the head of the house and I forbid any dealings with the Romans.

JOSEPH (*R. of James*): Now, look here, James! I'm not going to have you interfering! It's none of your business how we run the shop!

SIMON: You *are* being unreasonable, James—

JAMES: I will not have this place contaminated.

[*Hadrian rises—steps back—motions to Simon, who hands him hat.*]

JOSEPH: You're taking too much on yourself! (*To Hadrian. Joseph to C. of bench—Hadrian crosses R. below him*) I hope you won't call the deal off because of my brother's bigotry! (*James R. end bench*) He's not a carpenter, you know—

HADRIAN: Settle that between yourselves—and when you've finished wrangling let me know. (*Simon crosses to gate; opens it. To James*) If Romans did menial work such as carpentry, we wouldn't have come to you. (*Bites into fig, crossing to gate. Takes another fig; turns to Joseph*) Your figs are really excellent. (*He exits majestically.*)

[*Simon salutes—closes gate.*]

JOSEPH (*Joseph turns to James—his voice shaking with anger—crosses to James*): You've gone too far

this time, James! It's all very well for you to be righteous and pull a long face at doing business with the Romans. But Simon and I have families to support. Our wives and children—and you, too, if it comes to that! Simon, call Mother! We'll settle this thing once and for all!

SIMON (*going toward house*): Mother! Mother!

JAMES: She'll agree with me. (*Crosses down L. to stairs.*)

JOSEPH: We'll see about that.

MARY (*off in house*): What is it?

SIMON: Will you come out here?

MARY: I can't, Simon—I'm busy with my bread. Can't it wait?

JOSEPH (*to house step*): No. It's something that's got to be settled right now.

MARY (*half-humorously*): Oh, dear! All right.

JOSEPH (*to James*): We've carried the load in this house long enough. And we don't mind—if we're let alone. (*Crosses to above table*) Do we, Simon?

SIMON (*hesitantly, to James. Joseph slightly above James L.*): I don't think you realise, James, how keen competition is getting.

MARY (*Mary enters, her hands covered with dough. She surveys them, laughing. Crosses to L. of table*): Just let me get my hands in flour, and that's the signal for everyone in the house to want something! All right—what is it that can't wait? (*She looks from one to the other*) Well, who's going to speak first?

JOSEPH: You see, Mother—the whole thing is so unjust. (*Takes her hands*) You know how long I've been trying to get some really big contract that would carry us over the slow times? I don't want to be a one-horse carpenter all my life!

MARY (*smiling a little*): Yes—I know, Joseph. So?

JOSEPH (*warming up*): Well—I pull strings and work everyone I know to get in touch with the Roman—

[*James up to 3rd and 4th step of stairs L.*]

MARY: What Roman?

JAMES: I don't wonder you're surprised! He wants us to have dealings with—

MARY (*quietly*): I'll listen to you when your turn comes, James. Joseph is having his say now. Go on, Joseph.

JAMES: I've *had* my say! (*Stalks off upstairs L.*)

MARY: Poor old James. (*Smiles*) He means well. (*Turns to Simon*) What's the trouble now?

SIMON: He wants to run this shop from a seat in the Synagogue!

JOSEPH (*crosses L. to foot of stairs—calls after James*): I say, if he wants to run it—let him come and work in it.

MARY (*L. of table—with gentle humour*): I think you're better off leaving him in the Synagogue. (*She pauses a minute to scrape some dough off her fingers*) I don't know what it is—but there's something about the Pharisee point of view that prevents James from hitting a nail on the head. (*Naomi comes from house—picks up bowl from fig tree bench. Seeing Naomi*) Oh, just a minute, Naomi, dear. Get my dough and mixing board, will you? I may as well do it out here. (*Naomi nods—goes in house. Turns back to Joseph*) All right, Joseph.

[*Simon gets chair for Mary. Mary sits above table. Simon sits R. of it.*]

JOSEPH (*crosses to Mary*): I finally saw him and got him to make us a really wonderful proposition. I talked it over with Simon—who wasn't sure. You know how Simon likes to be on the safe side—

MARY: That'll do, Joseph.

JOSEPH (*L. of table—leans on it*): Well, anyway—I even got Appius Hadrian to come here himself! And I assure you he doesn't go everywhere—

MARY (*puzzled*): Appius Hadrian? Oh—he's the Roman—

JOSEPH (*annoyed—steps back*): Now, don't say you haven't heard of him! I never saw such a family! He's the Public Administrator for the District of Nazareth!

MARY: Well, maybe I *have* heard of him—now that you mention it. (*Naomi brings the bowl and board, puts them on table—exits to house.*) Thank you, dear. (*Joseph turns up L. corner of stairs, face to post. Mary rises and starts kneading the dough*) Yes—Joseph?

JOSEPH: It's not much use my talking to you if you're going to have your mind on that bread!

MARY (*serenely*): If I couldn't do more than one thing at a time, how do you suppose I managed to bring up a large family? Go on—I'm listening.

JOSEPH (*turns to her*): Well, I go to all this trouble—have the deal ready to close—(*L. of table again*) and what thanks do I get? Appius Hadrian insulted by that strait-laced old fogey! (*He mimics James*) "We don't do business with foreigners!" And a nice fat contract slips right out of our hands!

MARY: Oh—a contract for what?

JOSEPH and SIMON (*together*): For crosses.

MARY: Crosses?

JOSEPH (*irritated*): Now, Mother—you know perfectly well what crosses are!

MARY: I'm not deaf, Joseph!

JOSEPH: I'm sorry (*sits under fig tree*). But James has me all upset. (*A slight pause*) You know—the crosses the Romans use for executions.

SIMON: They hang criminals on them. (*He extends his arms*) And nail their hands and feet—(*Does it*) like this!

MARY (*with a little shiver*): Don't, Simon!

SIMON: Well, I'm just telling you.

JOSEPH: Besides—that isn't what James objects to—it isn't the cross—it's the Romans!

MARY (*puzzled*): But I can't understand why the making of a few crosses is such a big contract—

JOSEPH (*interrupting*): A few? You don't call a hundred and fifty a year a few!

MARY: So *many*!

SIMON: They ship them all over the country. And ~~they~~ don't use the same ones over again. They leave them standing until—

MARY: *Simon! Please!*

JOSEPH: There wouldn't be any profit in it if the crosses were used more than once. (*Eagerly*) So you see what a good thing it is!

MARY: No, I don't! I'm surprised at you, Joseph, wanting anything to do with it.

JOSEPH: But I'm only trying to—

MARY (*he starts to speak, but she halts him with a gesture*): I'm not blaming you for trying to get ahead—it's your nature to be like that. But I don't believe in killing people—no matter what they've done.

JOSEPH: Only the lowest sort of criminals—

MARY: Even so. What have we to do with a business like that? And today—of all days! Jesus coming home—the whole town making ready to welcome him—and you sit here talking about Roman crosses!

JOSEPH: Every time I—

MARY (*cuts him short*): No! I'm not going to discuss it any further. I've got too much to do! Naomi! (*Pats dough into its final shape; resolutely wipes hands on towel.*)

SIMON (*to Joseph, trying to placate him*): But, Joseph, maybe we won't need the contract with Jesus coming home. With the crowds that'll be here, everyone will want new things—

JOSEPH (*brightening*): Maybe you're right.

[*Naomi enters from house.*]

MARY (*to Naomi*): Here, dear, take this in and put it in the oven.

DANIEL (*before Naomi can go into the house, Daniel appears on the top of the wall R. and stands flapping his arms like wings and crowing like a rooster*): Am I proud! (*Crows again*) And don't all the boys envy me!

[*Mary sits above table. Daniel jumps down, half tumbling, and lands with a clatter.*]

NAOMI (*below kitchen step*): How often have I told you not to jump that wall? You'll fall and hurt yourself one day.

[*Daniel starts across above Mary, who catches him and holds him on her R. He takes off hat—puts it on table.*]

MARY (*hugging the boy*): All the boys have jumped that wall—and none of them was ever hurt. So don't worry about Daniel.

DANIEL: You know, lots of the boys have had their fathers or uncles read in the Synagogue. That's nothing! (*To Simon*) But not one of them was ever invited to preach. Were they? Not even Uncle James, was he? Won't I be important! And if you knew the boys who want to come and play with me after school—so they can drop in when Uncle Jesus is here— (*Pauses to catch his breath. To Mary*) Got anything to eat?

NAOMI: Where are the onions I sent you for?

DANIEL (*blankly*): Onions?

NAOMI: Didn't you get them?

DANIEL: I forgot.

NAOMI: Daniel!

SIMON: The boy just hasn't any head—goes around in a daze!

MARY: How can the child be expected to remember anything on a day like this? (*To Daniel—rises—*

takes him to gate, gives hat to him) Go and get them now, dear. And if you go by the back door, you might find some cookies—

DANIEL: Thanks, Grandmother. (*Runs out gate. Mary closes gate.*)

[*Joseph rises, goes into shop, picks up chisel and wood.*]

NAOMI (*half smiling*): It's a disgrace—the way you spoil him.

MARY (*R. of Simon*): Nothing of the sort. Boys need encouragement. They're much shyer than girls. (*Joseph and Simon laugh. Mary turns toward Simon*) You needn't laugh. That's quite true. (*To Naomi*) I never had to worry about my girls. They both found good husbands for themselves. Of course, I wish they lived a little closer, but I suppose a man must stay where his business is. (*Mary above Simon, hands on his shoulder*) But my boys—I'll never forget how the whole family sat up nights with you, Simon, when you were trying to get up courage to propose to Naomi. No, boys need to be helped along. (*Simon crosses to Naomi. Both go off to house. A woman's voice is heard outside and Mary with linens starts hurriedly towards house. Joseph comes from shop to gate. Knock is heard.*) Oh, dear—if people keep coming I'll never get anything done! Let me get in the house before—

[*The gate is flung open by Joseph and Anna, another neighbour—a smaller, younger woman than Hepzibah—appears with Eben, the peddler, in tow. Mary Cleophas enters from house when Eben enters. Joseph exits, closing gate.*]

ANNA: Oh, Mary—Come on, young man. Don't let your feet stick to the ground! I want my friend to see these things before they go out of fashion!

MARY: Well, Anna—this is a surprise!

EBEN (*to R. of table*): Here are all the latest styles. Why go to Jerusalem, when I bring Jerusalem to you? (*Puts pack on table. Laughs at his own wit, dumps his pack and starts to display his wares.*)

ANNA (*effusively to Mary*): He's got the loveliest things! You ought to see the new dress I bought! I don't know what my husband will say—my spending so much—but an occasion like this doesn't happen every day. (*Starts for gate—turns back*) What are you going to wear?

MARY (*L. of table with tablecloths*): When?

ANNA: *When?* Why, Sunday when he preaches! Everyone'll be there!

MARY: Why, I don't know. I hadn't thought. I haven't anything new—

ANNA (*to Eben*): See—I brought you to the right place! (*To Mary*) I've got to run along but make him show you his whole line of goods.

MARY (*a little embarrassed*): Thank you, Anna. Goodbye!

ANNA (*out gate—shuts gate*): Goodbye!

MARY: I'll be glad to look—though I haven't much time.

EBEN: This is your chance to get the smartest things at half the cost in your local shops. Everything new, everything fresh.

MARY CLEOPHAS: You've got a pretty expensive line of goods, there, young man.

EBEN: Now look at this scarf. Sunset, I call it. "Oh! gracious sun which will appear again tomorrow in brighter colours!"

MARY (*to Mary Cleophas*): Do you think it would be very extravagant if I bought a new shawl? Just to throw around the shoulders—

EBEN: Just a minute, lady.

MARY (*puts linens on table*): Not too expensive.

[*Eben takes out striped scarf.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS: Oh, that's pretty!

EBEN (*Mary moves to below bench*): Pretty! It was a sensation at the circus last Fall. The lady who wore it rode on a zebra. (*Puts it down.*)

MARY: It's a little conspicuous— (*Meanwhile Eben brings out a blue scarf.*) Oh, that's the prettiest of all! (*Mary crosses below table*) Blue! His favourite colour! How much is that one?

EBEN: Ten pieces of silver.

MARY: It's lovely—but I can't afford it.

EBEN: If I was the mother of your son, there's nothing I couldn't afford.

MARY: You know my son!

EBEN: Know him? (*Crosses below R. end bench*) I'd be starving to death if it wasn't for him.

MARY: He helped you? Tell me about him.

EBEN (*R. of Mary*): When I say he helped me—I mean—well, wherever he goes there's crowds—and where there's crowds there's money. Sometimes I get so interested in what he says that I almost forget to sell my goods! He certainly knows how to hold people—right in the palm of his hand. (*Adds sheepishly*) You know, I listen to him and I think to myself—I won't drive such a sharp bargain next time—think of the other fellow, like he says. Then I get away and get mixed up in a business deal—and, well, I guess I forget all about it. You know how it is. (*Then with a burst of generosity*) Look, since you're his mother—I'll make you special prices. The blue scarf—nine pieces of silver. Sunset, seven pieces—

MARY: I'll take it. The blue one. (*Eben hands it to her. To Mary Cleophas*) Oh, dear—maybe I shouldn't! But I *do* want to look my best. (*Throws shawl around her shoulders*) Do you think he'll like it? (*She turns around for Mary Cleophas to get the full effect, her back to the gate. Suddenly Joseph bursts in gate.*)

JOSEPH: He's here! He's here!

[*Mary turns around so swiftly that the shawl slips unheeded from her shoulders. Mary Cleophas holds it.*]

MARY: Where? Where is he?

JOSEPH: Coming up the road!

DANIEL (*climbs wall and jumps down—runs into house, returns to step with Naomi and Simon*): He's here! Mother! Father! Uncle Joseph! He's here!

[*Joseph—into kitchen, then out and up L. of step; Reba enters and stands with him. Mary goes to the open gate—stands for one moment, looking. Then her arms fly out as she runs out into the road. The curtain starts to fall. Eben kneels, doing up his pack, and Mary Cleophas picks up the forgotten shawl and starts out after Mary.*]

[*Curtain.*]

ACT TWO

Scene II

A HOUSE IN NAZARETH—ONE WEEK LATER.

At rise of curtain the stage is absolutely empty. There is no sign of life either in the courtyard or from the house. After a moment there is a knocking at the gate, but no one answers. The large table is against wall between house and shop. A chair is centre. The long bench is off. Stool against wall just below gate. The knocking is repeated and after another moment's silence, the gate opens cautiously, disclosing Hepzibah. Hepzibah steps into the courtyard and takes a quick appraising look around. Stool R.C. Anna looks over wall above gate.

HEPZIBAH: Empty as a grave! (*Sees Anna*) Hello, Anna!

ANNA: Hepzibah— (*Enters gate.*)

HEPZIBAH: Come on in.

ANNA (*hesitating, yet eager, in gate*): Do you think we should?

HEPZIBAH (*R. above stool*): They ought to be glad anyone comes to see them—after last Sunday. *That* was a frost!

ANNA: It certainly fell flat. (*Closing gate*) It was good for the cake and sweet sellers, though. The crowd bought a lot. (*Looks around curiously.*)

HEPZIBAH: Even more than if he'd really performed the miracles. They got so tired of waiting for things to happen they ate everything in sight. (*Goes towards shop. Anna crosses above chair*) Well, if you ask me, I was glad to see this family put in its place. (*Crossing to shop*) The airs they put on when they heard he was coming.

ANNA: Not James.

HEPZIBAH: No, I'll say that for James. He was never taken in by Jesus. (*In doorway of shop—with satisfaction, looking in shop. Anna steps to look*) Look, Anna—not a piece of work in the shop! And all that new lumber they bought—just stacked up—(*Makes clicking sound of commiseration.*)

ANNA (*crosses down L., looking up L. stairs*): Someone might come in—

HEPZIBAH (*with a shrug*): We're just being neighbourly.

DANIEL (*Daniel comes out of house—stops short. Half closes door*) Oh, I didn't know you were here—

ANNA (*embarrassed*): Is anyone home?

DANIEL: Mother and Aunt Reba have gone to the country, but Grandmother's home. Shall I call her?

HEPZIBAH (*crosses L. to pat Daniel's hair—he pulls away*): Yes. We'd like to see her. (*Daniel exits into house—closes door. To Anna, crosses down L.—in a lower voice*) Anyone seen Mary since Sunday? (*Both front of fig tree.*)

ANNA (*shakes head "no"*): I think she took it pretty hard. She'd bought a new shawl. I talked to her the

day he was coming home—and my, was she excited!

HEPZIBAH: I know. I loaned her my dishes.

ANNA: Your *best* dishes?

HEPZIBAH: Not my best—but better than Mary has. The fuss that went on here in this house—you'd think no other mother in Nazareth ever had a son!

[*Mary comes out of house, closes door, carrying Hepzibah's dishes. She is pale and making an effort to be composed, and braces herself for the taunts she knows are coming. Anna nudges Hepzibah, who does not turn until Mary speaks.*]

MARY (*R. of Hepzibah and Anna, hears end of speech*): I'm sorry I'm so late returning your dishes—I meant to do it before—

HEPZIBAH (*takes dishes*): It's natural you should forget—with all your other troubles—I mean—so much to do, straightening things after—

MARY: Yes—I've been quite busy—getting the house tidied up—I sent the girls away for a little rest—they've taken Esther with them. And then Judah came home late last night—

HEPZIBAH (*surprised, looks at Anna*): I thought he was staying away another month?

MARY: No, he left his job and hurried home hoping to see his— (*Breaks off.*)

ANNA (*covering her slip—below Hepzibah*) —to see Miriam? I suppose they'll be getting married before long—

MARY: Yes. It's all settled—I'm working on his things now. (*Above to R. of chair C.—indicates sewing on chair.*)

[*Daniel enters from house with boat—crosses to wall, gets on stool and climbs up.*]

ANNA (*with relief in her voice*): Oh, well—with a good match like that, people are bound to look up

to you again— (*Breaks off, embarrassed*) Oh— (*Crosses to L. of chair C.*) I'm sorry, Mary. I didn't mean to say that. Jesus might do better another time. We all have our off days. Ezra, the singer, tells me that sometimes he can't get a full note.

HEPZIBAH: But he doesn't blame it on other people's lack of hearing! I don't like to hurt your feelings, Mary—but I'm not one to hold back anything. And I must say you always spoiled him. Made him think he was something special—

ANNA: It's not easy to bring up a lot of boys without a man in the family. (*To Mary—not unkindly*) You know, Mary—Jesus really ought to have known better than to come back here where everyone knows him. (*Joseph enters stairs L.; stands on landing until he speaks. When Anna crosses, Hepzibah puts dishes on fig tree bench and crosses down L.*) When a man's hammered on your cupboard doors and mended your roofs, you're not going to believe he's turned into a prophet over night.

[*Daniel is walking up and down wall—arms outstretched. Down stage for Hepzibah's speech.*]

HEPZIBAH (*with malice*): Well, Daniel—trying to do tricks like your Uncle Jesus? (*Crosses below Mary to Daniel*) If you like magic, there's a wonderful fakir in town this morning—an Egyptian. You ought to see him! (*Anna backs L. toward fig tree—turns and stops L.*) Makes flowers grow in a barren pot—tears a scarf in two and makes it all one piece again—

DANIEL (*balancing as he speaks*): Oh, Grandmother—couldn't we see him?

MARY (*terribly moved*): No, Daniel—

JOSEPH (*coming down stairs L. Closing door. Crosses toward shop*): Get down, Daniel! How often do we have to tell you to keep off that wall! (*Daniel jumps off wall. To Mary*) The boy'll break his neck one

day. (*Pretends to see Women*) Oh—hello, Anna—Hepzibah—I didn't see you. (*Yawns and stretches*) I'm late getting down this morning— (*To Anna*) We worked till after midnight getting a rush order through. (*Between Mary and Anna.*)

HEPZIBAH (*to up R. above and between Mary and post*): Busy, eh?

JOSEPH (*to Anna, R. of her*): That isn't the word! It's been a grind. (*Crosses to L. above Mary*) Did those new pegs come yet, Mother?

MARY (*blankly*): New pegs?

HEPZIBAH: Well, I don't know where I got the idea but I thought things were kind of slack—

JOSEPH: Slack? That's good! (*To Mary*) The way we kept you awake pounding half the night! (*Crossing into shop.*)

MARY (*playing up—painfully—above chair*): I'd—I'd better call Simon, hadn't I? If you're going to get busy at—at that job—

JOSEPH (*meanwhile picks up hammer and starts pounding. From shop*): Yes—tell him we haven't much time—

MARY (*to Women—starts towards house*): Yes— (*Is eager to get away but Daniel defeats her purpose.*)

DANIEL (*starts to house*): I'll go, Grandmother. (*Starts into house, Half closes door—calling:*) Father! Father: Uncle Joseph wants you! (*Exits.*)

[*Joseph hammers and whistles with a great pretence of busyness. Hepzibah smiles a little scornfully while Mary clasps her hands tightly together in acute misery.*]

ANNA (*embarrassed—crosses to gate—opens it. Hepzibah starts to follow*): We'd better be going—

MARY (*C. of house door*): Yes—I'm afraid we're all a little late getting our work done this morning!

ANNA and HEPZIBAH (*together*): Goodbye— (*Start to exit, leaving the dishes.*)

MARY: Oh, Hepzibah— (*Mary picks up dishes*): You forgot your dishes—

HEPZIBAH (*crosses to her—takes dishes from Mary—Anna stays at gate*): Oh, yes—

MARY: And thank you. (*Both exit, Hepzibah closes gate. There is a pause, broken only by Joseph's hammering. Mary goes a little limp below chair*): You can stop now Joseph.

JOSEPH (*coming out*): You see, Mother—that's what we have to put up with all over town! (*Swings hammer.*)

SIMON (*rushing out from house—closes door*): Well, here I am, Joseph— (*Sees hammer*) Oh, got a job, have we? That's good! Who's it for?

JOSEPH: There isn't any job

SIMON: Well, then why—

[*Mary picks up sewing and basket—crosses to sit L. end fig tree bench.*]

JOSEPH: Just a little show for the neighbours. Anna and Hepzibah were here.

SIMON (*crestfallen*): Oh—I see. I thought for a moment—(*Breaks off.*)

JOSEPH (*swinging hammer*): Feels nice—having a hammer in your hand.

SIMON: I'd do a job for nothing—I'm so sick of sitting around. (*Sits R. of Mary.*)

JOSEPH: Well, you can thank your precious brother for this (*Throws hammer in shop.*)

SIMON: If he only *hadn't come back!*

MARY (*trying to control herself*): You were all pretty excited when we heard he *was* coming home—You were as pleased as anyone, Joseph.

JOSEPH: Of course I was! I thought he'd go over here the way he did other places. If he *had*— (*Sighs*) Well, I guess it's easy to fool strangers. (*Turns C. chair—sits on it facing downstage.*)

SIMON: He might have thought of what this would

do to *us* before coming back. Having your brother run out of town—

JOSEPH (*with a shiver*): I'll never forget the way they rose up against him in the Synagogue and drove him out to the edge of that cliff! They'd have pushed him over, too, if he hadn't got away.

[*Mary stops sewing.*]

SIMON (*lowering voice*): Joseph, how do you suppose he did it? There was a lot of talk about his—well—just vanishing—

JOSEPH: His disciples slipped him away. (*Indignant anew*) And there's another thing! That crowd he got together for disciples. He couldn't pick people that might do him some good! A lot of ignorant fishermen! He'll never get anywhere with *them*!

MARY (*sewing again*): Please, Joseph—Do we have to have that all over again!

[*Mary Cleophas comes out of the house. Mary looks up with relief at the interruption.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS (*in door*): Judah up yet?

MARY (*her face brightening*): He's having a good sleep. (*Looks up towards roof*) Poor boy—he needs it after that long trip. (*Pause*) My, but I'm glad to have him home again.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*crosses L.*): I should think you would be. (*James enters at head of stairs L.—closes door*) At least he looks cheerful—which is more than I can say for some of the faces around here. Oh, hello, James— (*Sits below Mary—bench L.*)

JOSEPH: I suppose we've got a lot to be cheerful about!

MARY (*with a tremendous effort*): I—I think you're making all this even worse than it needs to be. These things blow over—

JOSEPH: That's easy to say.

MARY: Well, they do. People will talk about this—

because it's the last thing that happened. And they'll keep talking until something else comes along. It's always like that in a small town.

SIMON (*slowly*): It seems pretty unfair—

JAMES (*on 2nd and 3rd step*): Just a minute, Simon—If Jesus had been a great success here—it would have helped you, wouldn't it?

JOSEPH: Of course.

JAMES: Well, that would have been unfair, too. I mean—you wouldn't have really earned it—but you would have taken it, I think you should accept it when it turns out this way, too.

JOSEPH: Come on, Simon, I'm going to the store—(*Crossing below chair to gate. Simon rises and follows. To Mary*) Don't wait lunch for us.

DANIEL (*entering from house*): Can I come, too?

[*Joseph exits.*]

SIMON: I suppose so.

[*Daniel runs out, pushing past Simon.*]

MARY (*rises—crosses down R.*): Simon?

SIMON (*stops—turns to her—Both below chair*): Yes, Mother.

MARY: Try to get Joseph into a good humour. I want things pleasant for Judah—his first day home.

SIMON: I'll try.

MARY: That's a good boy. (*Simon exits—closes gate. James crosses to house step. Mary turns to him, R. of chair*) And James—it—it was nice of you to speak up—

JAMES (*below L. of step—clumsily*) Right is right.

[*He exits to house; closes door. There is a moment's silence.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS: I sometimes wonder how Jesus would feel if, all the time he's preaching peace and brotherly love, he knew the wrangling that's gone on in this house ever since he left.

MARY: Oh, Mary Cleophas, I don't know—it's so difficult! (*Pause—crosses above chair*) I've always encouraged Jesus and stood up for him but lately I've wondered if I was doing right—if I was doing my duty to my other children. (*Crosses to sit fig tree bench*) After all, they've got their lives to live, they're entitled to their share of happiness. Goodness knows what they ask is harmless enough! Just work to support their families!

MARY CLEOPHAS: Yes—and the way things are—I suppose you can't blame them for taking it pretty hard.

MARY: People weren't in the right frame of mind for him to come back just now. No one here had any real faith in him. But their local pride was stirred up. Then when he came—and you know how simple he is—and he went around without making himself important—just living here as he'd always done—well, they just couldn't accept him—that's all.

MARY CLEOPHAS: I suppose they expected to see him wearing a gold crown.

MARY: Something like that.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Still, you've always treated him as though he were different from the others.

MARY: He *is* different. Even before he was born I knew he was different. I— (*Breaks off. Rises—crosses R. Pause*) You know, I'm glad Judah didn't get home in time, after all. He loves his brother so—it would have hurt him to see how he was treated here. Well, his life is going to be happy—Miriam is a lovely girl— (*Crossing to Mary Cleophas, sits on tree bench*) Oh, I knew there was something I wanted to ask you—with the wedding coming on—I was wondering if you could lend me a little money!

MARY CLEOPHAS: Of course! How much do you need?

DANIEL (*Daniel coming in over wall crosses up L. above chair*): Grandmother—the Rabbi and Mendel are coming to see you—I passed them on the road—

MARY (*rising abruptly*): The Rabbi! and Judah not up yet! (*Smooths her hair and dress, turns to Mary Cleophas*) Am I all right?

MARY CLEOPHAS (*rises and nods—crosses to gate*): Yes, I'll open the gate.

MARY: I half expected Mendel, but not the Rabbi. I thought he was still away. (*Mary Cleophas opens the gate and Rabbi and Mendel come in. Both look ill-at-ease. Mary, smiling, but nervous underneath*): Oh, Rabbi Samuel—I'm so glad to see you! (*Shakes hands with Rabbi—nods to Mendel*) And you, too, Mendel.

[*Mary Cleophas closes gate—stands down R.*]

RABBI: Thank you, Mary. (*There is an awkward pause.*)

MARY (*crosses down L. toward stairs*): My Judah isn't up yet. He came home last night—I'm making him take a good sleep. But I'll call him now—(*Half turns to stairs.*)

MENDEL (*R. of Rabbi*): No, Mary. (*Mary stops*) The Rabbi wants to talk to you alone. (*Looks at Mary Cleophas.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS: I'll go inside. (*Above chair R.*): How's business, Mendel?

[*Mary moves sewing to extreme L. corner of fig tree bench.*]

MENDEL: Not bad.

MARY CLEOPHAS: A marriage broker certainly has the edge on all the other trades.

MENDEL: How's that?

MARY CLEOPHAS: He's got Nature for a partner!

(*Rabbi crosses to below fig tree bench*) Come along, Daniel.

[*Daniel and Mary Cleophas exit into house.*]

MARY: Can't I offer you some refreshments?

MENDEL: Well—

RABBI: I don't think so. (*together*)

MARY (*crosses to L. of C. chair*): A little glass of wine?

[*Mendel arranges chair for Mary.*]

RABBI (*sits on tree bench*): What we've come to say isn't very pleasant, Mary. The quicker we get to it the better. (*Removes hat—puts it L. of him. Mary sits in chair. Pauses, then turns to Mendel*) Mendel, shall I go on?

MENDEL (*relieved—crosses L. between and above them*): Glad to have you.

RABBI: Aaron has called off the marriage between Judah and Miriam.

MARY: Called it off!

RABBI: Yes.

MARY: But *why*?

MENDEL: I hate to say this, Mary—and the words are my client's—not mine.

MARY: Go on.

MENDEL (*reluctantly*): Your family is getting a bad reputation.

[*A long pause.*]

RABBI (*barely audible*): Because of Jesus!

MARY: Oh, but that's so unfair! Why should the boy suffer for his brother?

MENDEL: That's just what we said to Aaron.

MARY: What did he say?

MENDEL: That things like this run in families. You can't tell where they'll break out next.

MARY (*indignantly*): And we're supposed to sit here and do nothing—well, I won't! (*Rises—crosses almost to gate*) I'll go to Aaron myself.

RABBI: It's no use, Mary. (*Mary stops*) He's closed his shop and taken his family away.

MARY (*at gate—a little bitterly*): Didn't even give us a chance to defend ourselves.

[*The Rabbi and Mendel exchange a look. Mendel signals the Rabbi to speak.*]

RABBI: He did make one condition, Mary. Grudgingly—but he made it.

MARY (*hopefully—crosses toward Rabbi—to L. of chair*) You mean—he might change his mind? What is it?

RABBI: It's something *you* must do.

MARY (*eagerly*): But I'll do anything! You know I will. Only tell me what it is!

RABBI: You must never receive Jesus here in this house again.

MARY (*incredulous*): No—

MENDEL: That's what Aaron says—

RABBI: Disown him. Cast him off. Forget that he ever existed.

MARY: Oh—

RABBI: It's a hard choice, Mary. But it's your responsibility. You're the one who must decide.

[*Mary sits on chair. Mendel does not speak till she is down. Pause.*]

MENDEL: You know this business about Jesus upset Aaron from the very beginning. He always said—"If he's a miracle worker—I'm a Roman Emperor!" I tried to tell him—Judah's a fine young man. Nothing like his brother. (*Crosses to sit L. bench*) A little hot-tempered perhaps, like all Nazarenes—but marriage will settle him down, I got him partly satisfied—then Jesus came back here

with all that to-do about him, and was a failure—
That finished Aaron!

RABBI: Well, Mary—?

MARY (*after a pause*): My house will be open to Jesus as long as I live.

RABBI: It seems pretty hard for Judah to pay for his brother's mistakes. You said so yourself, Mary.

MARY (*after a pause*): I can't understand it! Why did they all turn against him? What is he teaching that could possibly do anyone any harm?

RABBI: He excites the people. Puts a lot of new ideas in their heads, Starts them thinking. You see, Mary—it's so easy to get off on the wrong foot. Mind you, *I've* no objection to his teaching, even though he isn't a Rabbi. After all that only means "teacher." I think he's honest and sincere. But very indiscreet. And when people criticise him, see what he says—"Don't judge people if you don't want to be judged yourself."

MENDEL: But then he goes on to make it worse with a deliberate dig at the Pharisees—and you know how touchy they are—calling them names, insulting them. Tells them they're full of hypocrisy and corruption.

RABBI: Word about him has got to Jerusalem and right now, when things are so unsettled, it's a bad time to talk about the equality of man and the oppression of the poor. But that's the history of all reformers. They go too far. I don't want to worry you, Mary, but you mustn't close your eyes and your ears to the danger he's in.

MARY (*rises—crosses R.*): That's all I've heard since the day he left home to preach! Everyone predicting he'd come to a bad end. And every day more and more people believe in him. (*Up R.C.*) Oh, what I've learned about human nature from this town! All my old friends hardly able to wait until they get inside the gate to tell me some scan-

dalous story about him! No wonder he was a failure here! And you—who invited him—you were always a fair man, but now you've put yourself on the side of the Pharisees who hate Jesus because they see their power and their influence slipping away from them—because word of Jesus and his work is spreading all over the country. That it's even reached Jerusalem. And it'll go on! People like you can't stop him! No one can stop him!

RABBI (*furious—rises—Mendel rises*): I came here as a friend—trying to spare your feelings—I didn't come here to be insulted! (*Hat on. To Mary—L.C. of her*) But now, I'll tell you something! If someone doesn't get hold of your son and stop him—he'll end up like his cousin John with his head on a harlot's platter. He's got the Temple and the government so stirred up against him—why I wouldn't give you that—(*Snaps his fingers*)—for his safety! Not that! (*Snaps his fingers again.*)

[*There is dead silence as the Rabbi breaks off, breathless. Mary walks over to the gate and opens it and stands there.*]

MARY (*almost in a whisper*): I don't like to ask a Rabbi to leave my house—but I can't have you talking like that about my son. The streets are free—you can say what you like in them. But this is his home. (*Her voice breaks a little. Rabbi looks at Mendel—motions him to go. After his exit Rabbi crosses to L. of Mary. The Rabbi pauses. He is profoundly moved and we must feel that he realises her outburst was maternal, and not directed at him personally.*)

RABBI (*touches Mary lightly*): I'm sorry, Mary. I lost my temper. (*Pause*) All I know is—if he were my son—I'd be worried. (*He exits after Mendel, leaving Mary shaken by these last words.*)

[*Mary is left alone; closes gate and slowly crosses to*

fig tree bench—picks up sewing. Judah enters when she takes sewing and sits under fig tree. Judah comes from upstairs L. and clatters happily down, talking as he comes. Mary turns, like one stricken. In her defence of Jesus she has forgotten all about Judah.]

JUDAH: Mother! Why did you let me sleep so late? Half the day's gone and I haven't seen Miriam! *(He is at the foot of the steps by the time he finishes and crosses towards the gate.)*

MARY *(sharply)*: Don't go now! *(Judah halts)* I mean—I want a little visit with you myself. *(With an heroic effort at self-control)* Come and sit down by me—there's a good boy—

JUDAH *(hesitating—almost at gate)*: I *did* want to see her—

MARY: After a while.

JUDAH *(crosses to above chair C.)*: You know how late it was when I got home last night? *(Mary nods)* I went the long way round so that I'd pass her house. It was all dark—but I knew where her window was—and I just stood there and looked and imagined her lying asleep with all her hair loose on the pillow— *(A pause)* Mother?

MARY: Yes, dear—

JUDAH: Now that it's so close I'm—I'm a little nervous about getting married— *(Crosses to her)* I mean—Miriam's so young— *(Sits on bench R. of Mary)* been so sheltered—and I don't know very much.

MARY *(choked—puts sewing down L. of her)*: Oh, my dear!

JUDAH: I want to be a good husband—and I don't know how. I mean—I don't know all the things that make a happy marriage. I can't go to Simon or Joseph. They'd laugh at me.

[There is a pause while Mary struggles to speak.]

MARY: Do you love her so very much, Judah?

JUDAH: Why, *Mother!*

MARY: I mean—you're young—there are lots of other girls—

JUDAH: Other girls! I've been going to marry Miriam ever since I can remember!

MARY: Aaron is such a difficult man—always causing trouble—

JUDAH: Well, I'm not going to marry *Aaron!* And that reminds me, Mother. I wanted to tell you—Miriam and I decided a long time ago that we'd like to come here and make our home—that is, if you'll have us—

MARY (*rising—holds Judah's head against her. Then stands*): Judah, the Rabbi and Mendel were just here. They brought bad news.

JUDAH: What's happened? Is Miriam sick? (*Rises*) What *is* it, Mother?

MARY: Aaron has called off the marriage!

JUDAH: But he can't do that! It's all settled—

MARY: Aaron's pretty influential. It isn't easy to go against him—once he's roused. Mendel and the Rabbi did their best—

JUDAH (*Only half listening*): But what have I done?

MARY: You haven't done *anything!* (*Searching desperately for reasons*) It's just that—Aaron's ambitious and—and we aren't exactly what you'd call a prominent family— (*She breaks off. Judah makes move away L.*) There's nothing we can do, Judah. He's taken Miriam away.

JUDAH (*turns to her*): But there must be a *reason*, Mother— (*Crosses to Mary*) What is it? He must have said something. Mendel and the Rabbi wouldn't come here on just nothing! They wouldn't dare!

MARY (*Mary realises that she can't evade the truth any longer. She faces Judah with as much courage as she can muster*): I don't know how to tell you! (*Puts*

her hands on his shoulders) The only one of my children who never gave me a moment's worry! *(Pause)* Judah—he won't let you marry her—because of your brother—

JUDAH: *My brother?*

MARY: Because of —Jesus.

[There is a silence while Judah stares at her.] •

JUDAH: You mean they've called off my wedding because of Jesus? *(He pulls away—Mary holds him.)*

MARY: Yes. *(She puts her arms around him)* Oh, Judah—I don't know what to say to you—I know how hard this is on you! It's hard on me too!

JUDAH *(Judah shakes her off, turns L. away from her, half mad with grief and resentment. He is young enough to be nearly in tears)*: It's easy to talk! But I'm young! And my life's going to be ruined just because I've got a brother with crazy ideas!

MARY: Judah! Oh, I know how hurt and upset you are, dear—but try to remember how fond you were of each other! Why, Jesus was your favourite brother! He used to carry you around—

JUDAH: I don't care what he was! He's ruined my life! *(Turns toward Mary. Pause. A step toward her)* Wasn't there *anything* you could do—

MARY: Aaron did make one condition—

JUDAH *(crosses to her)*: Why didn't you tell me? What was it?

MARY: It was something impossible.

JUDAH *(impatiently)*: What was it?

MARY *(slowly)*: He wanted us to disown Jesus—forbid him the house—

JUDAH: Well, why didn't you do it!

MARY: Judah!

JUDAH *(rushing on—crosses down to G., R. of Mary—then faces her)*: What does he care about us! He goes his own sweet way—running around the

country doing as he pleases! (*Stops C.*) Why should we worry about him?

MARY: Judah—don't!

JUDAH: I hate him! I *hate* him! I wish he were dead! (*He brushes past Mary, flings open the gate and goes out into the road. The gate closes sharply behind him. Mary stands alone on the stage—*)

[*Curtain.*]

ACT THREE

Scene I

A STREET IN JERUSALEM. NIGHT.

A small square in a poor district. Up Left Centre, on ramp, is a wide-ledged fountain with running water. There are three entrances. One at Left, another at Rear Centre, and a third at Right. They are all arched and the streets presumably go through the low buildings that frame the three sides of the square.

Houses and shops are shuttered against the night. Candles glow in windows here and there.

At rise: Girl is filling pitcher at pump. Woman stands waiting her turn. Mary Cleophas is discovered sitting on the ramp. She has taken her sandals off and is rubbing one of her feet, talking as she does, to Woman.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*sitting L. of well—on ramp*): I'm a stranger here. My sister and I came to see my nephew. They're supposed to be having supper somewhere around here. My sister's trying to find the place. (*Girl goes off C. to R. Mary Cleophas looking around*) I don't know as I'd care to live in a big city.

WOMAN (*filling pitcher R. of well*): It's not very neighbourly. And no place for the children to play but in the street. I'm always after my husband to move out into the country—at least, as far as Bethany.

MARY CLEOPHAS: We were there today. Some friends of my nephew's—it's a pretty little place.

WOMAN: Yes, it is. But this is nearer his work—and you know how men are. (*Finishes pumping and holds cup to get drink.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS: I don't suppose you know my nephew, do you? This is a big place—but he's quite a figure—from what they tell me—

WOMAN (*Pausing*): What's his name?

MARY CLEOPHAS: Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth.

WOMAN (*her attitude changes*): That man!

MARY CLEOPHAS: Then you do know him?

WOMAN (*turns down R.*): Don't insult me! I wouldn't have anything to do with him!

MARY CLEOPHAS: But I thought he created such a stir here last week—rode through the city—

WOMAN (*turns to Mary Cleophas*): Broke the Sabbath to do it!

MARY CLEOPHAS: But the people waved palms and cheered. I heard they made a real demonstration.

WOMAN: A lot of idlers and roustabouts! I haven't any use for him! (*Turns*) Stirring people up—turning families against each other! Telling them what to do and what to say! Who does he think he is?

MARY CLEOPHAS: Did you ever see him?

WOMAN: I don't have to! I've heard enough about him. (*Drinks.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS: I've known him since he was a little boy. I don't agree with everything he says. But he's a good and honest man.

[*The Roman Soldier's whistle is heard off.*]

WOMAN (*crosses to pump*): You wouldn't say that if

you knew what he did here last week. Drove the money changers out of the Temple with a whip—where they'd been ever since anyone can remember. That was a fine thing to do, with old Annas getting a percentage on all the money that changes hands. And as if that wasn't enough—he told them they could tear down the Temple—tear it down, mind you—and he'd rebuild it in three days.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*startled*): He didn't say that?

WOMAN (*with satisfaction*): That and worse! He called himself the Son of God! (*Child enters R. whistling—kicking stone—crosses up C. and off L.*)

A blasphemer! (*Long pause*) I maybe shouldn't have said so much—with you his relative—

MARY CLEOPHAS: Speech is free. I'm not one to stop anyone from speaking their minds. But I'm glad his mother didn't hear you. He's the apple of her eye. (*Woman puts cup on top of pump and picks up water jar*) Besides, I've heard these things before and nothing ever came of it. (*Puts shoes on.*)

[*The Roman Soldier's whistle is repeated off.*]

WOMAN (*R. of pump*): He's going too far now. Even though they're used to fanatics here.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Fanatic! So that's what they call him.

WOMAN: And the class of people he has for followers! That red-headed dancer from Magdala—at least that was *one* of her professions—

MARY CLEOPHAS: I've heard of *her*.

WOMAN (*acidly*): She makes a show of herself! Breaking alabaster jars of perfume over his feet and bathing them with it and wiping them off with her hair!

MARY CLEOPHAS (*reluctantly*): It does sound kind of pagan.

WOMAN (*steps toward Mary Cleophas*): They tell me that back in Magdala she had more servants

than she could count. Gold plates to eat off and silk sheets to sleep under.

MARY CLEOPHAS: You don't say! (*Breaks off and rises as she sees Mary coming R.*) Oh, here's my sister now. Well—it's been nice having this little talk. Goodnight.

WOMAN: Good night (*She eyes Mary curiously as she exits below Mary Cleophas L.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*to Mary*): Did you find it? •

[*Both below pump.*]

MARY (*wearily*): No. And I looked at all the two-storied houses.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Two-storied?

MARY: Don't you remember—Selima said they were having supper in an upper room.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Oh, yes.

MARY: But there wasn't a sign of them. Then I had to turn back. There were soldiers pouring into the square.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Soldiers?

MARY: Roman soldiers. A lot of them. (*The whistle is repeated off*) That's their signal again. They were being gathered from all over the city. It—it made me uneasy.

[*Man enters C.—looks R.—steps on—looking L.—then looks R. again. Closes shutter on window R., then goes off R.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS: There's always something going on in Jerusalem. Especially at this season. (*Light in L. upstairs grille window is extinguished*) You shouldn't have come here, Mary. You should be home where you belong with your family.

MARY: You've been wonderful. Stood by me when all the others turned against me.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Well, I'm not sure it was good sense.

MARY: You don't suppose those soldiers have anything to do with—with—

MARY CLEOPHAS: Now Mary, I know how important Jesus is to you—but they're scarcely calling out the Roman army for him! Now, sit down and rest. (*Sits L. end of pump*) Oh, those cobblestones!

MARY (*down R.*): If we only knew which house it was! And it's getting so late.

MARY CLEOPHAS: That woman Selima certainly got us on the wrong track! If we hadn't gone to her—

MARY: But it was *her* sons who made the arrangements for the supper—

MARY CLEOPHAS: The way she trails them around the country! Her James and her John! I should think it would drive them crazy. And what was that business about who'd sit where?

MARY: I didn't quite understand. Something about wanting to know when Jesus became king—if he'd promise seats on each side of the throne to her sons. (*Suddenly serious*) All this talk of thrones and kingdoms—he never cared for things like that—(*Breaks off*) I can't get those soldiers out of my mind!

MARY CLEOPHAS: If there had been anything really wrong—wouldn't they have told us at Bethany? Surely they'd be the ones to know—with him sleeping there every night!

MARY: You know, it's been years since I was in Jerusalem. But I don't remember it's ever being so—so unfriendly.

MARY CLEOPHAS: That's because you're tired.

[*Centre window light upstairs is extinguished.*]

MARY: No, It's something else. Everything is so still—and yet it isn't peaceful. As if something were waiting—the way it is before a thunder storm. You know, I thought once I got to Jerusalem I'd feel better knowing he was so close. But I don't. I

shouldn't even say this, but for the first time in my life—I'm frightened. (*Footsteps are heard off, then Judas enters L.—stops just inside arch—then crosses to up C. before Mary stops him. Mary rises quickly, speaking to Mary Cleophas as she does so*) It's Judas! Judas Iscariot! He can tell us where they are! (*Judas halts at the sound of his name. Mary goes to him. Judas R. side in C. arch—Mary down L. of him*) My, but I'm glad to see you! We've been searching for hours!

JUDAS (*toward her a step—confused*): Searching?

MARY: For Jesus and the others! They're having supper near here, aren't they?

JUDAS (*stops toward her*): Yes—they are. But it's so late—

MARY CLEOPHAS: That's what I said. We could have stayed comfortably at Bethany and seen him tomorrow. (*Rises—steps toward C.*) But she thought something might happen—

MARY: You know how you'd feel. Is he all right?

JUDAS: Why yes—of course—

MARY: If he is in any danger you've got to tell me. I've come all this distance—

JUDAS: Everything has been going on as usual.

MARY: But they say he is upsetting law and order in Jerusalem.

JUDAS (*evasively*): People use words lightly.

MARY: And that he breaks the Sabbath!

JUDAS: He doesn't know the meaning of time.

MARY: You're hiding something from me! What is it?

MARY CLEOPHAS (*chidingly*): Mary! (*Crosses step toward Mary*) After all, his safety must mean as much to Judas as it does to you— (*To Judas*) She's been so worried.

MARY (*barely hearing Mary Cleophas*): He isn't in trouble—with important people—that is— who might do him some harm?

JUDAS (*haltingly*): It's—it's hard to say—such a mixed crowd here in Jerusalem. You're bound to offend someone—sooner or later. Of course he knows he runs that risk—but he won't listen to anyone—

MARY: When did you see him last? Did you have supper with him and the others?

JUDAS: I left early.

MARY: Oh, then they're still there! (*Mary crosses to Mary Cleophas—Judas follows her. To Mary Cleophas*) We'll get to him after all!

MARY CLEOPHAS: Is it very far?

JUDAS: About fifteen minutes' walk.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*to Mary*): *Fifteen minutes!* (*To Judas*) All right, lead the way.

JUDAS (*crosses to Mary*): I can't. I'm—I'm—in a hurry. I have an errand— (*His voice trails off.*)

MARY (*turns to him*): If you'll tell us how to get there—

JUDAS (*steps down R. a little and nervously says*): You go down that way—(*Points L.*) until you come to a wide cross-street—and there's a fountain in the middle—a square one. You turn left there and go straight along until you reach the street of the water-sellers—

MARY CLEOPHAS: How'll we know it?

JUDAS: There're always donkeys tied to the racks.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Not at *this* time of night!

JUDAS (*impatently*): There'll be a lot of water jars standing about. You can't miss it. (*He is eager to get on his way.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS: Now, let's get this straight. I've had all the wrong directions I want in one evening. (*She repeats directions slowly, to his intense nervousness*) We go down that way—(*Points L.*) until we get to a wide street. (*She stops*) I didn't know there were any wide streets in Jerusalem.

JUDAS: I mean—wider than this.

MARY CLEOPHAS:—and there's a fountain—

JUDAS (*impatiently*): Then you turn left—

MARY CLEOPHAS: —and find the street of the water-sellers. And the house is there. Which house is it?

JUDAS: The third house, It has a balcony.

MARY CLEOPHAS: What's the man's name?

JUDAS: Nathan!

MARY (*to Mary Cleophas*): Can't you see he's in a hurry? (*To Judas*) Don't worry about us. We'll find it quite easily now. (*Judas crosses to C. arch. Pause*) I hope we haven't made you late.

JUDAS (*faces R. in a strangled voice*): No, There is still time.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*grudgingly*): Good night.

MARY: Good night. And thank you. (*Judas turns to her*) You're sure no harm can come to him?

JUDAS: He says no one can destroy him.

MARY CLEOPHAS: What does he mean by that?

JUDAS (*with panic in his voice*): I don't know! I don't know! (*He rushes off C. to R.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS: Another fifteen minutes!

[*Both have turned and start off L.*]

MARY (*crosses to Mary Cleophas below her*) Oh, it doesn't matter—now that we know where we're going. I'm so glad Judas left early!

[*Trumpet as curtain is coming down.*]

[*Curtain.*]

ACT THREE

Scene II

A HOUSE IN JERUSALEM. NIGHT.

This is the upper room in the house of Nathan, the water-seller. It is of good size with the main door leading from downstairs at down Right. A smaller door leads to a room up Right which cannot be seen. In the near wall are three windows as in Da Vinci's picture of the Last Supper, with shutters. A window down L. The shutters are open.

The room is bare save for a long table which runs across the stage, Centre back. Scattered around the table are thirteen small cushioned hassocks—empty now, but pushed away at various angles by the recent diners. On the table are candlesticks with the candles still burning—the remnants of a meal (roast lamb, bread, honey, fruit, etc.) and at Centre of the table are a large silver goblet and a flagon of wine. A chair down L.

The stage is empty at rise of Curtain. Hold long enough for the significance of the set to register. Then Mary and Mary Cleophas enter through the door down Right and stand staring at the empty room.

MARY (*in great disappointment*): Oh, we're too late! They've gone! (*Crosses below table.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*goes above table and looks at the food. Crosses L. above it*): Not long, though. The best thing we can do is sit down and wait. Someone'll be coming along to clear away the food.

MARY (*Mary starts, indecisively, to cross towards a seat*): If we'd only been a few minutes sooner! Or if we knew where they've gone.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*L. of table*): You see, Mary—I was right. We shouldn't have come.

MARY (*below R. end of table*): Oh, I'm so disappointed! I *counted* on seeing him.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*moves stool from L. of table to L.C. below and against table*): Better sit down and rest awhile.

MARY: I—I don't know as we ought to stay. After all, we're strangers. They might not like to walk in and find us sitting here. (*She looks around, distressed and uncomfortable.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*Sitting on stool she just moved*): I don't like to be disagreeable, Mary, and I'm not one to complain—' (*Pauses, then adds with a dry smile*) Well—not overmuch—but I'm not going to walk one more step on those cobblestones until I know *where* I'm going—and *why*!

MARY (*crosses to down R. door*): There must be somebody around here who can tell us— (*turns L.*) I wish we'd asked Judas what this errand was. That might have given us some idea. (*By table*) I hope they gave him a good supper. (*Below table.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*rises*)—*Both stand below stool—Mary R.—Mary Cleophas L.*): I hear someone coming.

MARY: Maybe he's come back! Don't say anything about what a hard time the boys are having. Anyway—not at first.

[*She turns expectantly. Mary Magdalen enters, down R., pausing in surprise and alarm. She is plainly dressed but carries her clothes with a certain air. She has beautiful red hair. Mary and Mary Cleophas turn to her.*]

MAGDALEN (*just inside door down R.*): What are you doing here? Who let you in?

MARY: Why, no one. The door was unlocked.

MAGDALEN: Who are you looking for at this hour of the night?

MARY CLEOPHAS (*irritated*): Are you the woman of the house?

MAGDALEN (*one step on*): No, I'm not. Who do you want to see?

MARY (*moves toward Magdalen*): We're looking for Jesus of Nazareth.

MAGDALEN: Who told you he'd be here?

MARY: Judas. He showed us the way—

MAGDALEN (*looks out door R.*): Judas! I thought he'd gone with the others—

MARY: We met him in the street alone.

MAGDALEN (*crosses toward Mary*): Where was he going?

[*Mary Cleophas regards Magdalen curiously.*]

MARY: He didn't say. He seemed in a great hurry. He just told us how to get here—surely this is the place. (*Pause*) Hasn't Jesus been here?

MAGDALEN (*again secretive*): They've all gone.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*below stool*): Why, I know who you are! You're from Magdala, aren't you?

MAGDALEN: I *was* from Magdala.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Selima told me about you.

MAGDALEN: Selima talks too much. (*Pause*) Who are you?

MARY CLEOPHAS (*indicates Mary*): This is the mother of Jesus.

MAGDALEN (*is dismayed at learning Mary's identity. Steps back*): Oh, I'm so sorry—I had no idea—

MARY: I'm glad to know you. You're a friend of my son— (*Steps to Magdalen and takes her hand.*)

NATHAN (*off R.*): Magdalen! Magdalen!

[*Mary crosses to Mary Cleophas. Nathan enters down R.*]

MAGDALEN (*turning*): Yes— (*Sees Nathan— is greatly agitated, tries to quiet him and keep him from speaking before the two women.*)

NATHAN (*below and R. of Magdalen*): They bought swords tonight! Jesus told them to even sell their cloaks if they had to—but to get swords!

MAGDALEN (*quieting him with a look*): You're just in time to meet some friends of Jesus'! Well, not friends, exactly. This is his mother and—

MARY (*indicating Mary Cleophas*): And my sister.

NATHAN: I never thought about his having a family!

MARY: Is anything wrong? Anything about my son?

MAGDALEN: No. Just something about the house. Nathan is the proprietor here. It was he who made all the arrangements for the supper tonight.

NATHAN: And he'll never get a better one! Not if he lives to be a hundred! Fit for a king!

[*Roman trumpet is heard.*]

MARY: The Roman soldiers!

[*Nathan crosses to R. window. Mary and Mary Cleophas step back L. and face Nathan across the table—about Centre of it.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS (*L. of stool*): My sister met some in the street.

NATHAN (*at window*): What were they doing?

MARY: Getting orders to go somewhere.

NATHAN (*turns down to table*): Did you hear where?

MARY: Why—yes, I did. Let me think. (*Pause*) Is there somebody here called Pilate?

MAGDALEN: Yes—there is.

[*Nathan crosses down L. of Magdalen.*]

MARY: Well, it was his house they were going to.

MAGDALEN (*again warning Nathan—puts her hand out to Nathan to stop him*) Probably to quiet some disturbance. There's always something happening in Jerusalem—especially at this time of the year—holiday crowds—

NATHAN (*steps to Mary*): I don't believe you ladies had better wait here. There's no telling when he'll be back—

MARY CLEOPHAS: I'm not going another step for anybody! (*Sits on stool below table.*)

MARY: But where has he gone?

NATHAN: They've just gone for a walk. In the hills, I guess.

MAGDALEN: They often go up Gethsemane way. 'There's some gardens there.'

NATHAN: I haven't any rooms left, I could direct you to another place—

MAGDALEN (*sharply—crosses to Nathan, R. of R. stool*): You can't turn them out at this hour of the night! Let them wait here. (*Nathan turns to Magdalen in protest—she quiets him with a touch on his arm*) I'll be responsible. (*To Mary*) They're very strict about closing time for eating houses—

NATHAN: Yes—that's it.

MAGDALEN (*continuing*): But don't worry. You can stay right here.

MARY CLEOPHAS: That's good sense!

MARY: If he's gone to the gardens—maybe I could look for him there (*To Nathan*) I don't like to inconvenience you—

MAGDALEN: It's a hard, rough road—besides, you'd never find it in the dark. I know what we *could* do—(*To Nathan*) we could send your boy with a message—

NATHAN: It's getting pretty late—

MAGDALEN: Oh, he won't mind. Tell him to— (*She breaks off and turns to Mary*) Wouldn't you like to talk to him yourself—tell the boy just what to say?

MARY: Yes, I would.

MAGDALEN: He's down in the kitchen. (*Nathan starts to object. Magdalen steps downstage. Nathan goes off down R. Mary follows*) Show her the way, Nathan. (*Looks after her, then turns back to Mary*)

Cleophas, her manner one of urgency and warning. Magdalen crosses to Mary Cleophas) You must get her out of Jerusalem!

MARY CLEOPHAS (*startled*): What's that?

MAGDALEN: Get her away from here! Take her home!

MARY CLEOPHAS: You mean—there's going to be trouble?

MAGDALEN: Yes.

MARY CLEOPHAS: But what kind of trouble?

MAGDALEN: None of us knows! That is, none of us—except—

MARY CLEOPHAS: Except who?

MAGDALEN: I think Jesus knows. He tried to tell the disciples tonight. To prepare them (*Pause*) He was like a man going on a far journey!

MARY CLEOPHAS (*rises—crosses down R.*) Then she must see him before he goes—

MAGDALEN (*below R. end of table*): It's not safe for her to stay here. Not safe for anyone who is close to him— (*Remains at down R. corner of table.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*To down R. door*): I begged her not to come! But I couldn't stop her. No one could. I never saw her like that before, It's as if she knew something was going to happen (*R. of table to C. window*) I tried to tell her he was all right but since we got here, I haven't been so sure. (*Suddenly remembers*) Tonight while I was waiting for Mary in the street, I asked a woman if she knew him. (*At L. corner of table*) Well. I knew he wasn't popular with everyone—but the things she said about him! I was glad his mother didn't hear them! And this woman—who had never even seen him—acted as though she hated him!

MAGDALEN: That's it. (*Crosses to R. window*) His most bitter enemies are people like that, People who've never heard him speak, who don't even know what he teaches. But they're afraid he'll up-

set the old order of things. So, because they fear him—they hate him.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*to L. end of table*): But if he knows all these things—why does he stay?

MAGDALEN (*at R. Window*): He says he must wait until what is written has been done.

MARY (*enters down R., relieved at having sent the message. Crosses below table to R. of stool*) Well, the little boy has gone to tell him that we're here. I do feel better—

MARY CLEOPHAS (*around L. of table to L. of stool*): That's good! Now perhaps you'll sit down and rest yourself. (*Puts her arm around Mary and sits her on stool. To Magdalen*) She's been on her feet the whole day—and we're neither of us getting any younger.

MAGDALEN (*to Mary—crossing R. of table to below R. stool*): Is this your first visit to Jerusalem?

MARY: Oh, dear, no. I came quite often as a girl. And then when my children grew up, I came with them. I've even been to Egypt!

MAGDALEN: Really? (*Mary Cleophas crosses to chair L.; sits*) I've never travelled *that* far.

MARY: I didn't care much for it. But my husband—he was a carpenter—he got a lot of building ideas. (*Pause*) If you're not too busy, I wish you'd stay and tell me about my son, I'm so *hungry* for first-hand news of him.

MAGDALEN (*to R. of Mary*): I'd love to.

MARY CLEOPHAS: We hear such mixed-up stories back home. He says one thing here in Jerusalem and by the time it's repeated all the way to Nazareth—well, you can imagine how it sounds! So she just had to come and find out for herself.

MARY: I've always tried to think of my other children—to see their side of it. Suddenly I couldn't any longer—It was as if they all just melted away. I didn't *have* any other children—Only this one—and he was in trouble.

MAGDALEN (*turns to get stool R. of table—sees cloak*): Oh, he's left his cloak! (*Takes cloak—looks off R., holding it.*)

MARY (*holding out her hand for cloak—Magdalen gives it to her*): Isn't that just like him? Never thinks of himself. But I don't see why some of those disciples can't think of him once in a while. (*She cradles it in her arms.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS: Oh, they're too busy worrying about themselves! Who'll sit at the right hand and who'll sit at the left! So he goes out in the cold without a cloak! Just let something go wrong—When you get into trouble you find out who your friends are!

MAGDALEN: He knows that. That's what makes him so wonderful.

MARY (*surveying cloak*): And it's torn, too! If I had a little thread I could mend it while I was waiting
—

MAGDALEN: Leah usually keeps some up here. (*She looks around*): Oh, I know—it's in the next room.

[*She exits up R.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS (*rises—crosses to L. of Mary*): Mary, I think we ought to go home—back to Nazareth, I mean—

MARY: Without seeing him!

MARY CLEOPHAS: Well—no—but as soon as you do
—

MARY: Oh, once I've seen him I'll do whatever he says.

MARY CLEOPHAS: This is no place for us to be.

MARY: But you were the one who didn't want to go any further—

MARY CLEOPHAS: Well I feel differently now.

MARY: Not because of *her*?

MARY CLEOPHAS: No. She's a real nice woman. You'd never think she'd led that kind of life.

MARY: S-sh—she'll hear you!

MARY CLEOPHAS: There must be something to the things he teaches—to change a person that way.

MAGDALEN (*returning with needle and thread*): Will this do?

MARY: Oh, thank you— (*Taking it*) yes—it's good and strong.

MAGDALEN (*moving L. candelabrum close to Mary*): There, I think you'll have enough light.

MARY (*starts to sew. Looks up with smile*): How this takes me back! When he was a little boy his knees went through everything! He played so hard. (*Mary Cleophas sits down L. in chair*) And when he grew up and went into the carpenter shop he worked the same way. Never knew when it was time to stop.

MAGDALEN (*gets R. stool—moves it R. of Mary—sits*): He's like that now. Works until he drops. He has so much he wants to say—he seems almost afraid he won't have time to say it. (*She quickly covers this ominous note by adding*) The other day while he was talking it grew dark without his even knowing—and the people stayed on and listened—way into the night.

MARY CLEOPHAS: He always was a good talker. It's a real gift (*Tawns.*)

MARY: What did he talk about that time?

MAGDALEN: About a shepherd who lost one sheep. And how he left the whole flock and searched and searched the night through until he found it. And how happy it made him and what it meant to him to bring that one lost sheep back into the fold, I love that story.

[*Mary Cleophas is asleep.*]

MARY: How I wish I could have been here and heard these things! But I feel easier in my mind

about him—talking to you. Please tell me more. Do great crowds gather when he preaches?

MAGDALEN: I should think so! You know how fond he is of little children? Well—the other day when he was preaching a lot of them gathered around and someone complained. But Jesus said if having the children running about shouting and laughing while he preached annoyed the older people—then *they* could leave. That Heaven itself was made up of the innocent and the simple-hearted.

MARY (*looking at sleeping sister-in-law*): There's something I want to ask you—while my sister's asleep. I want to ask you—about the miracles. (*Breaks thread and puts needle on table.*)

MAGDALEN: I—I can't say much about the miracles. They just *were*. (*Pause*) Of course, he performed a great many more in the beginning when he first started out on his work. But lately he's turned more and more to teaching. Telling people the way to live. And a great deal about understanding and forgiveness. And the beauty of human life. I don't believe he thinks miracles are very important. He always says a man isn't really any better after seeing something spectacular than he was before. He'd much rather talk about loving them than hate you than raise the dead. After all, he's not concerned with the death of the body. But the disciples—they'd like more miracles. Excitement—and the crowds. But he does less all the time. There is one thing he wants them to believe above everything. It underlies every word he says—it is the very foundation on which his whole teaching is built.

MARY: And what is that?

MAGDALEN: The dignity—and the greatness of man. People criticise him for calling himself the Son of God. They forget how much more often he calls himself the Son of Man, Because Man is God—and God is Man.

[*Roman Trumpet is heard outside, Magdalen rises in alarm; looks R. Mary sees this, Mary Cleophas does not waken.*]

MARY: You feel you owe a great deal to my son, don't you?

MAGDALEN (*turns to Mary*): Without him—I am nothing.

MARY: Then you must tell me the truth about him. Is he in danger?

MAGDALEN (*searching for an evasion*): There is no greatness without danger.

MARY: But why? What does he say or do or teach that anyone could possibly find fault with?

MAGDALEN (*almost bitterly*): He blesses the poor and the meek. And the hungry. (*Sits as before*) And those who weep. And he tells them all the same thing—rich and poor alike. “If you love me—take up your cross and follow me.”

MARY (*apprehensively*): Cross!

MAGDALEN: That's a figure of speech he uses. He means—self denial. (*Pause*) And then—he blesses those who have sinned. I—I don't want to—to embarrass you—or bore you by telling you about myself. You probably know already—

MARY: Only what I've heard—and you can't judge people by that.

MAGDALEN: You looked just like him as you said that! But, you see, it's his acceptance of people like me that they condemn! This whole idea of repentance and forgiveness. No one ever taught it before. Being born again! Think what that means!

MARY: I can *see* what it means.

MAGDALEN: I was deaf—and now I hear. I was blind and now I see. (*Pause*) The world will never be the same—because he has lived!

[*Magdalen overcome with emotion, sinks down, her head in her hands. Mary, seeing her shivering, puts*

Jesus' cloak around her shoulders, then takes the silver chalice from table and offers it to Magdalen.]

MARY: Drink a little of this wine. It will warm you.

[As Magdalen is drinking the murmur of crowd outside starts. When Roman trumpet sounds it wakens Mary Cleophas. Magdalen puts chalice on table. When trumpet sounds Magdalen and Mary look at each other in alarm—then Mary crosses around L. of table to window R. Magdalen to down L. window; closes shutter. Mary Cleophas wakens and steps down.]

MARY CLEOPHAS: What's that?

VOICE (outside): Take him to Pilate!

MARY CLEOPHAS (rises—steps down C.): Someone call me? (trumpet call is repeated) They're certainly worked up over something—(the noise is growing closer and louder.)

VOICE (outside): Jesus of Nazareth!

[Other voices say "Jesus of Nazareth." Nathan bursts in R. Magdalen to L. window—closes shutter.]

NATHAN (from doorway): Get away from that window! They've arrested him! (Crosses up to window R.—closes it—crosses to C. window) I don't want my house mixed up in this!

MARY: Arrested!

NATHAN: They're taking him to Pilate!

MAGDALEN: How did they know where he was? Who told them?

NATHAN (closes shutter C. window): Judas Iscariot.

MAGDALEN: Judas! But the other disciples—what were they doing?

NATHAN (Crossing down and out R. as he speaks): Running for safety!

MARY CLEOPHAS (Crosses down below stools): Deserted him!

MARY (*stunned*): Arrested! I must go to him. (*Crossing to down R. door—Mary Cleophas stops her.*)

MARY CLEOPHAS (*crosses quickly toward Mary*): No, no! They've only trumped up some charge against him.

[*Nathan exits as Magdalen, Mary and Mary Cleophas cross to door. Mary makes no answer to her sister but at the doorway she stops, turns and goes across the room to the stool and picks up his cloak. All the others have gone.*]

MARY: He'll need this. They may keep him all night.

[*As she starts again for the door down R. the shouts in the street reach a crescendo and Mary stands, Jesus' cloak clasped in her arms, as she hears the words—"Crucify him! Crucify him!"*]

[*Curtain.*]

ACT THREE

Scene III

THE HOUSE AT NAZARETH. EIGHT YEARS LATER.

It is late afternoon, nearly dusk on a warm day in midsummer. The fig tree is heavy with green leaves and purple fruit. From the carpenter shop come occasional sounds of someone working. It is Simon in shop with work. The long table is against back wall Right of house door. A stool or chair Right Centre.

Naomi is busy at the up L. table. There is a small oil wick burning in a little basin and there is a three-branch candlestick on the table, unlighted with a taper beside it. The table is spread with a fine cloth and

Naomi is putting some plates and bowls on it. She moves rather quickly, humming a little to herself. As her back is turned to the wall, Daniel, now a lad of sixteen or so, vaults the wall and lands in the courtyard with a clatter. Naomi turns with a start.

NAOMI: Oh! Be careful, Daniel! You'll fall one day, and hurt yourself!

DANIEL (*C. laughing*): Mother, you've been saying that to me ever since I can remember and I've never hurt myself yet! I just saw Uncle Judah hurrying down the street. Is he looking for old Beulah?

NAOMI (*nodding—crosses to him—both C.*): They expect the baby any time now. (*Looks at him*) Daniel, go right in and change your shirt. It's a sight!

DANIEL: But I only put it on clean this morning!

NAOMI: This is afternoon and we're having company for supper. (*Pushes him. He crosses to stairs*) Important company. Now, hurry!

DANIEL (*stops on stairs*): Esther's young man? I heard Uncle Joseph talking about him.

NAOMI: Since you know—all right. Now get yourself clean and stay clean. (*Pushes him off.*)

DANIEL: Oh, all right!

[*Daniel exits into the house; shuts door. Naomi crosses to the shop and calls.*]

NAOMI (*L. of shop door*): Simon!

SIMON (*appears with some work in his hand in shop door*): What is it, Naomi?

NAOMI: Don't you think it's time you got washed and dressed?

SIMON: Is it late?

NAOMI: No—but everyone in the house will want to get ready at the same time. There won't be enough hot water to go round, and we don't want any fuss—especially with Judah's baby being born.

I must say I do think Deborah might have waited a day.

SIMON: I'll just finish this and then I'll come. (*Goes in the shop.*)

[*Reba comes out of the house with horn. She blows a couple of long blasts.*]

NAOMI (*to Simon*): You see! She's calling Joseph! (*At table.*)

SIMON (*in shop*): Have you got my clean things ready for me?

NAOMI (*at table*): Everything's laid out.

SIMON: Wait a minute—

REBA (*calling from house*): Esther! Esther! Are you ready yet?

ESTHER (*off up L.*): I'm fixing my head-dress. Wait till you see how it looks.

SIMON (*coming out of shop*): Isn't that a new dress?

NAOMI (*nods—smiling*): Do you like it? (*Simon kisses her*) I only have to put on my jacket when I hear them coming.

[*Simon and Naomi go into house—close door. Esther comes down stairs L. Reba enters from house; meets her by step C.*]

ESTHER (*she is wearing her hair braided like a coronet; over it a pale blue veil. Reba pulls her C. a bit. When Reba is at table speak*): Look, Mother! Isn't it lovely? Grandmother wore it when she was a girl. (*Joseph enters gate as she speaks*) Oh, I'm so happy. Father! How do you think I look?

JOSEPH (*closes gate—with pride*): My, but you look pretty! Like your mother the day we became engaged. (*Takes her arm*) Do you remember it, Reba?

REBA (*with a laugh*): Of course I do. I'm not so old that I've forgotten it! Go on, Joseph, get those dirty clothes off. (*Joseph starts for house door. Esther moves down L. Looks at them over her R. shoulder.*)

Joseph crosses to Esther.) Our guests should be here soon. Did you know—they're coming all the way from Damascus by camel?

JOSEPH (*surprised*): By camel? Are they that rich? I always wanted to travel by camel. (*Lowers his voice. Kisses Esther*) By the way, have you warned Esther not to mention—you know?

REBA (*nodding*): Yes—she understands. (*Mary appears in doorway upstairs*) Be careful—here comes your mother.

JOSEPH (*turning quickly*): Ah, there you are, Mother! Had a nice rest?

MARY (*descending stairs*): I haven't been resting. I've been with Deborah. Poor child, she's so uncomfortable this hot day.

REBA: Do you think it will be soon?

MARY: Who can tell? A baby comes when it gets ready. Is Beulah on the way?

JOSEPH: Judah's gone for her. (*To Reba*) I'll hurry and change. (*He exits into house; closes door.*)

MARY (*to L. of her—smiling*): I can't get used to it! My baby rushing after a midwife for *his* baby! (*Pauses*) It's nice, though. I never get over being grateful that Judah found a good wife after all. (*Another pause*) Nearly time for the guests, isn't it? (*With a smile for Esther*) Someone's getting impatient. (*Turns to Esther.*)

ESTHER (*shyly; crosses L.*): They say he's very handsome.

MARY (*in mock surprise*): Handsome? Why, it seems to me someone said he was cross-eyed and had a hare-lip—and walked with a limp. (*Turns to Reba*) Isn't that right, Reba?

REBA (*playing up to her*): That's what I heard.

MARY (*laughs. Esther laughs as she understands. Mary crosses to Esther below fig tree*) Still it wouldn't matter, would it—if he had a good character? (*Pats Esther's cheek*) Oh, Reba, will you take a look in the

kitchen and see how the supper is getting on? (*Reba goes into house; closes door. To Esther*) Happy? (*Adjusts veil—embraces Esther—makes her sit L. of her on fig tree bench*) There, that's better. Why, you're trembling! Here, now, we can't have that. There's nothing to be afraid of.

ESTHER (*with a little gulp*): I'm going to live so far away.

MARY: Damascus is a good ways off—but, just think! You'll be head of your own house—no old mother-in-law to make life miserable, the way I do around here. And then before you know it, your babies will be coming along. Wait until you have your first one! Nothing makes you feel so important as your first baby. I'll never forget mine—(*Breaks off—a shadow crossing her face—rises; crosses to C.*) Look—there's the first star! (*Pause*) Like the one at Bethlehem. (*Throws off mood with effort*) There now, don't let me start talking about—about when I was young—or the company won't get any supper! Here they are now. (*Crosses to step C. Esther runs into house calling, "Mother—they're here!"*) Joseph, Reba—they're here!

JOSEPH (*enters. Reba follows*): I'll go. (*He opens the gate and Judah enters with Beulah, the midwife, at his heels. Joseph speaks in a disappointed tone*) Oh, it's you!

[*Simon and Naomi enter from house and sit on fig tree bench. Naomi L.—She ties his tie.*]

JUDAH (*laughing—below gate*): That's a fine greeting for a prospective father.

JOSEPH: I didn't mean it like that. I thought it was our guests from Damascus and I rushed out only half dressed.

[*Beulah stops to greet Joseph. Judah motions her on—she crosses to down L.*]

JUDAH (*to Mary*): I thought I'd never find Beulah. Half the women in Nazareth picked out today to have babies. (*To Beulah. Joseph shuts gate*) Hurry upstairs, will you, Beulah? You know the way.

BEULAH (*crosses to stairs—Judah follows—rushes her*): With my eyes shut!

MARY: Do you need any help?

BEULAH (*on stairs*): Not yet. If we do later, I'll call you. (*Starts upstairs.*)

JUDAH (*calling after her—R. of stairs*): Be sure you make it a boy!

BEULAH (*turning on stairs*): I'll do my best—but you should have thought of that sooner.

[*Mary to table. All laugh. Beulah continues upstairs. Judah follows her.*]

JOSEPH (*R.C. to Reba, smoothing his clothes*): Am I all right now?

REBA: You look fine.

[*Joseph paces L., then to gate, restless for Mary Cleophas's entrance.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS (*enters gate*): Who's this prancing around like a peacock? (*Joseph turns to her*) Oh, its Joseph. I've brought the wine. (*Up C. to Mary with jug*) How are you going to have it, hot with spices?

MARY: I think so. Yes—since we're going to eat outside we'd better have it hot.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*gives jug to Mary. Joseph shuts gate*): I can't think why anyone wants to eat outside! You never know what's going to fall in your food. For heaven's sake, Joseph, light somewhere! You're not the bride!

[*Before Joseph can answer, the gate is flung open by Mendel. Joseph crosses down to him.*]

MENDEL (*at gate*): They're here! I ran all the way

from the market place as soon as I got out of their sight. (*Crosses to Joseph up R.C.*) I'm all out of breath! Someone give me a drink!

MARY CLEOPHAS: I knew he was leading up to that!

JOSEPH (*steps down*): Naomi, go in and tell Esther. (*Naomi goes into house—taking jug from Mary*) Where are they now, Mendel?

[*Judah enters from upstairs.*]

MENDEL: At the Inn. Leban wouldn't hear of anyone seeing to his camels but himself. Special grain and all that. Spends money like a prince. And the boy! Handsomer than ever!

[*Simon rises to talk with Judah upstairs.*]

JOSEPH: Shouldn't we have gone to meet them? After all—they're strangers here.

[*Esther starts from house to Reba. Naomi follows her—stays L. of her.*]

MENDEL: Make us seem too anxious! I've left my assistant to show them the way. (*Sees Esther—crosses L. to L. of Joseph*) Ah—there she is! Looking like a picture! I saw a big sack full of presents for I wonder whom! You're a lucky girl!

REBA: All the luck isn't on our side, Mendel. You don't see a girl like Esther every day.

Mary Cleophas crosses below Esther and Reba.]

MENDEL: There's luck on both sides. That's what makes it a good match. (*He turns to Joseph.*)

[*Joseph goes to gate. Judah starts upstairs—Simon follows him. Judah stops on steps to talk over railing to Simon. Mary crosses down R. toward Mendel. Joseph closes gate. Naomi, Reba and Mary Cleophas are arranging Esther's veil.*]

MARY: Mendel!

MENDEL: Mary! Oh, I'm sorry— (*Joseph is close to gate*) I didn't see you in all the rush. My, but you're looking well—and on a busy day like this! Your hands full with the engagement supper—

MARY: Never mind about the supper, Mendel. When you first met Leban and his son in Damascus last year—did you tell them all about our family?

[*All move in a little. Simon turns C.; listens.*]

MENDEL: I should say I did! What a wonderful woman you are—what—

MARY: You're sure you told them about everyone?

MENDEL: I was at my best. You should have heard me. I went back five generations—I got them so tangled up in the family tree—

MARY: You left no one out?

[*Judah goes off upstairs L. Simon and Naomi on house steps. Three raps at gate.*]

MENDEL: They're here!

[*There is a general scurry. Esther goes close to her mother, L.C. Joseph looks at Esther and Reba—then goes to gate. Mary detains Mendel.*]

MARY: You haven't answered me, Mendel.

MENDEL (*in a desperate whisper*): Why stir that up again, Mary? You're a respectable family. You've lived it down. (*As Joseph opens the gate Mendel rushes forward; speaks at gate*) Leban!

MARY CLEOPHAS (*has come closer to Mary, an expression of pity on her face—L. of Mary*): I'd be awfully sure I was right before I said anything, Mary.

[*Mary nods. Mary Cleophas pats her arm. The visitors—Leban and Joshua, his son, are entering the courtyard. There are greetings between the Men. Joshua steals glances at Esther, who has moved over to one side, alongside her mother. Joseph steps forward; closes gate.*]

MENDEL: This is Joseph, Leban—

LEBAN: This is my son Joshua.

JOSEPH: I'd like you to meet our womenfolk. (*Leban crosses up to Mary—Mendel at gate*) Mary, my mother—and Mary Cleophas, my aunt—my wife—my sister-in-law—and my daughter, Esther! (*Leban and Joshua bow in time with each introduction. Esther gives one pleased look, then drops her eyes. Joseph, anxious to get them all in the house, is over-hearty as he adds*) And now—shall we go into the house and have a little glass of wine? Then we must go over the contract once more.

[*There is a murmur of assent.*]

MENDEL: I have suggested a little change. That if any of the donkeys are in foal their young are included in the dowry.

JOSEPH: Yes, yes, of course!

MENDEL: And very good luck if they are—sign of a large family. I'll make that change when we get inside.

JOSEPH: Then, when everything's signed, our young people here—(*Indicating Esther and Joshua*)—can have a little chat and get acquainted.

MENDEL (*with professional sentiment*): Well, if looks mean anything they're not exactly strangers—even now!

[*There is general laughter. The young couple look confused and embarrassed. Joseph gestures towards the house.*]

JOSEPH: It's cool inside—

[*Esther crosses to R. of L. table. Reba stands behind and below her.*]

MARY: Just a moment, Joseph. (*To Leban*) I'm sorry to interfere at the last minute like this—but since no one else will speak, I'm afraid I'll have to. I can't let this go on without saying something.

MENDEL (*one step C.*): Please, Mary—don't be unreasonable!

MARY CLEOPHAS (*step down L. of Mary*): Be quiet, Mendel.

[*Joseph looks at Reba and makes a helpless gesture.*]

LEBAN (*puzzled*): I don't understand.

[*There is a buzz of whispering among the family. Mary silences it with a little gesture. A dead silence follows.*]

MARY: What I have to say isn't easy. You see—(*There is a painful pause*)—we had a little trouble in our family—(*She falters.*)

LEBAN: Yes?

MARY (*summons her courage and forces herself to a complete statement in one sentence. As she speaks the stage begins to slowly darken*) My oldest son—he got into some difficulty with the authorities.

LEBAN (*hesitantly, to Mendel*): Is that James—the one who's away?

MARY: No, not James. The one I mean is dead. (*Pause*) He was killed.

LEBAN (*sympathetically*): Oh, I'm sorry. An accident?

MARY: They thought he was trying to stir up trouble and they—they crucified him.

LEBAN: Crucified him?

MARY (*with sudden desperation*): Don't you see what I'm trying to tell you? My son was Jesus of Nazareth! (*Her voice breaks.*)

[*There is a long pause. Leban looks questioningly from one face to another but the Family avoid his gaze, not knowing that he is trying to conceal the fact that the name means nothing to him. Joseph breaks into the silence, anxiously, when Leban looks at him.*]

JOSEPH (*eagerly, in a rush*): You're not going to let

this come between the young people, are you? After all, it's a long time ago, and outside of that no one can say a word against us. Everything we told you about our family is true.

MEDEL: Absolutely true.

JOSEPH: I admit we did leave that out—about my brother. Maybe we shouldn't have—but my daughter's happiness means a lot to me. (*His voice breaks a little*) I didn't want to spoil her chances.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*who has been watching Leban*)! Save your breath. The man's never heard of him:

[*The others stare at Leban with incredulity.*]

LEBAN: Well—you see—I'm afraid I live so far away—

[*General reaction.*]

MARY: He was quite well known.

[*They are upset—a little indignant over Leban's ignorance.*]

MARY CLEOPHAS: Well known! He was the talk of the country! When he came to a town you couldn't find a place to sleep.

[*All relax.*]

JOSEPH: Do you remember that time in Capernaum? (*To Leban*) We heard so much we went there to see him—and the place was packed! We couldn't even get near him. Imagine, his own family!

SIMON (*crosses down L. of Mary Cleophas*): He made towns important that no one had ever heard of before. And he had all sorts of offers from neighbouring places.

JOSEPH: And then, he was always the guest of the local Synagogue. He'd preach there on Sundays.

LEBAN: He was a Rabbi?

MEDEL: Not a regular Rabbi.

SIMON (*quickly—sits fig tree bench. Naomi stands R. of him. Mary Cleophas crosses up L. of Mary*): They called him that.

MARY: He wasn't interested in what people called him. That was one of the things he tried to teach his disciples.

LEBAN: He had disciples?

MARY: They hung on every word he said—

SIMON: —when things were good. But they didn't stand by him so well when he got into trouble—

MARY CLEOPHAS: Stand by him! They ran like rabbits!

MARY: I hear now and then that some of them are keeping on with the work. I hope it's true. It'd be a shame to have it all lost. He worked so hard—never took any care of himself. You know—looking back—I've often thought he knew he wasn't going to live long.

SIMON: There was some talk of people seeing him again—after—

[*Mary Cleophas back to and touches Mary.*]

MARY: I used to wait for him. I thought surely if he came anywhere it would be here, to his home. But he never came.

LEBAN (*moves to Mary*): What did he teach?

MARY: Why—to—love your enemies—never to judge or condemn anyone—to be forgiving. And to make life as easy as you could for other people. (*Pauses—groping for the most important things*) To live for a purpose in which you believe and never let anyone keep you from your belief—not even your own family. You must be willing to die for it. And not to be afraid of people who kill the body. Because, after that, there is nothing more they can do. (*Pause in which she feels she must make this last point dreadfully clear—and searches for the right words*) And to remember always that human life is

beautiful—and noble—because it houses God. (*She is aware of startled look on Leban's face—and extends idea*) I mean—when you degrade or dishonour human life—you degrade and dishonour God. (*There is a moment of dead silence*) That was all he taught.

LEBAN: Has anyone ever tried it—to live the way he taught?

MARY: I don't think so.

LEBAN: Might be interesting to see what would happen if they did.

MARY CLEOPHAS (*thoughtfully*): It's too simple.

MARY (*turns to her*): You know, I think that's what caused all the trouble. They couldn't understand that it was all just as simple as that. That there wasn't something behind it. So they accused him of trying to attack the Government.

LEBAN: Then it was a political offence?

MARY: I guess you'd call it that. (*Embarrassed*) I—I never really quite understood! (*Mary Cleophas takes her arm*) They hurried me out of the city—I think he told them to. I never saw him again.

[*Knock at gate—Mendel crosses to gate.*]

MENDEL (*opens gate*): It's the Rabbi! Now we can get down to business.

[*Joseph and Leban prepare smiles for the Rabbi. Leban crosses down stage.*]

RABBI: Well, well. How's everything?

JOSEPH (*steps to Rabbi*): Fine! (*Glances at Leban, who makes no denial*) Just fine! This is our Rabbi Samuel. (*To the others*) How about that glass of wine now?

[*All assent. Rabbi goes off into house with Leban, R. of him. Joseph and Joshua next. Reba and Esther start almost with Joseph and Joshua. Esther and*

Joshua give each other a look. Simon calls to Mendel and they go with Naomi.]

JUDAH (*enters L., stops at foot of stairs*): Everything go all right, Mother? Did they sign?

MARY CLEOPHAS: They're just doing it.

JUDAH: That's fine.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Well—how are things going? •

JUDAH: A little slow.

MARY CLEOPHAS: Then it'll be a boy! They're unobbliging—even before they're born! (*Exits into house.*) •

MARY (*with careful casualness*): If the baby's a boy—what are you going to name him?

JUDAH: We haven't decided.

MARY: I wish— (*She pauses.*)

JUDAH: What, Mother?

MARY: Will you do something for me, Judah?

JUDAH: Of course I will! What is it?

BEULAH (*from upstairs*): Judah!

JUDAH (*calling up*): Coming! (*He starts up two or three steps, Mary going a step or two with him. He stops—*)

MARY (*looking up as she speaks*): If it's a boy, will you name him after your brother— (*Hesitantly*) After Jesus, I mean?

JUDAH: Why—why, yes, Mother. I'll talk to Deborah about it— (*He leans over the railing of the staircase and kisses her.*)

MARY: It's a nice name— (*Pause*) I'd like him not to be forgotten— •

[*Judah runs up the stairs and Mary stands alone for a moment on the stage. The light has faded and it is nearly dusk. Mary turns and goes towards the up L. table, picks up the taper and lights it from the little wax wick, and then lights one of the three-branched candlesticks. As she does this—*]

[*The Curtain falls.*]

THE
HAPPIEST DAYS
OF
YOUR LIFE

A Farce

by

JOHN DIGHTON

The cast of the London production at the Apollo Theatre on March 29, 1948, was as follows:

DICK TASSELL	-	-	-	<i>Myles Eason</i>
RAINBOW	-	-	-	<i>Douglas Ives</i>
RUPERT BILLINGS	-	-	-	<i>Colin Gordon</i>
GODFREY POND	-	-	-	<i>George Howe</i>
MISS EVELYN WHITCHURCH				<i>Margaret Rutherford</i>
MISS GOSSAGE	-	-	-	<i>Viola Lyel</i>
HOPCROFT MI	-	-	-	<i>Peter Davies</i>
BARBARA CAHOUN	-	-	-	<i>Molly Weir</i>
JOYCE HARPER	-	-		<i>Patricia Hastings</i>
THE REVEREND EDWARD PECK				<i>Stringer Davis</i>
MRS. PECK	-	-	-	<i>Betty Woolfe</i>
EDGAR SOWTER	-	-		<i>Douglas Stewart</i>
MRS. SOWTER	-	-	-	<i>Irene Relpb</i>

The play produced by Richard Bird.

All applications to perform this play professionally should be made to H. M. Tennent Ltd., Globe Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.1. Applications for licence for representation by amateurs should be made to Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton St., Strand, London, W.C.2.

Characters

DICK TASSELL *Assistant Master at Hilary Hall*

RAINBOW *School Porter and Groundsman*

RUPERT BILLINGS *Senior Assistant Master at Hilary Hall*

GODFREY POND *Heddmaster of Hilary Hall*

MISS EVELYN WHITCHURCH *Principal of St. Swithin's School for Girls*

MISS GOSSAGE *Senior Assistance Mistress at St. Swithin's*

HOPCROFT MI *Pupil at Hilary Hall*

BARBARA CAHOUN *Pupil at St. Swithin's*

JOYCE HARPER *Assistant Mistress at St. Swithin's*

THE REVEREND EDWARD PECK

MRS. PECK *His wife*

EDGAR SÖWTER

MRS. SOWTER *His wife*

SCENE

The Masters' Common Room at Hilary Hall School for Boys, in Hampshire.

ACT I *The first day of summer term.*

ACT II *Saturday afternoon. Three weeks later.*

ACT III *Two hours later.*

*For
Kathleen*

ACT ONE

The Masters' Common Room at Hilary Hall is furnished with the typical austerity of its kind. A long oak table dominates the centre of the room, there are one or two moderately comfortable armchairs near the fireplace, R., and a number of plain wooden ones scattered elsewhere. A door L. leads to the Headmaster's study. In the centre, at the back, are french windows, giving a view of the school grounds. To the right of the windows are double doors leading to the hall outside. These are at present closed. Between the windows and the double doors is a bookcase with school books and directories. Two lockers for personal belongings are on the wall R., on either side of the fireplace. Underneath the downstage locker is a small table with a telephone and some old magazines on it. On either side of the door to the Headmaster's study, L., there are bookcases filled with school books, directories and so on. The sun is shining brilliantly outside and the room, if not luxurious, is light and airy.

As the curtain rises, the double doors are barged open from outside and Dick Tassell enters. He is a tall, cheerful young man of about twenty-six, hatless and in a sports coat and grey flannel trousers. He has had to shoulder the door open, as he has a suitcase in either hand and is also laden with a tennis-racquet, cricket bat, pads and batting gloves. Behind him, in the hall, the front door of the private side of the school stands open, giving a view of the drive curving away to the right. There is a small table in the hall, with the school bell standing on it. The beginning of stairs can be seen rising to the upper floors, and the way to the boys' part of the house is off R., past the stairs.

Tassell staggers with his belongings to the centre table and drops everything on it. He mops his forehead

and looks round him with an air of resignation. Turning his head towards the double doors, he calls:

TASSELL: Rainbow! (*He goes to the locker upstage of the fireplace, opens it and glances in. Surprised and pleased*) Good Lord!

[*Tassell pulls out a dusty looking cap and gown, puts the cap on to avoid holding it and starts to shake the gown.*]

[*Rainbow enters from the school. He is a gloomy eyed man of middle age. Employed as school porter cum groundsman, he achieves a compromise by wearing a porter's trousers and waistcoat, but no tunic. His tone of voice matches his lugubrious expression.*]

(*In a friendly tone*) Hullo, Rainbow!

RAINBOW (*gloomy but pleased*): Mr. Tassell. (*As they shake hands*) Well, well. Very pleased to see you back, sir.

TASSELL (*wryly*): Not so sure than I am. After being airborne for five years, I'm afraid I'm going to find Hilary Hall a bit slow. (*Indicating cases*) I just want a thing or two out of these, then you can take them up. (*Looking round reminiscently*) Five years . . . You don't look a day older. (*Shaking gown*) A bit moth-eaten, that's all.

RAINBOW: Eh?

TASSELL (*indicating gown*): This. Never expected to find it still in my old locker. (*Goes to hang it up, with the cap, on one of a row of hooks, D.L.*)

RAINBOW: The school was evacuated, soon after you gone. Only come back this term.

TASSELL (*returning to table and starting to open case*): Gosh, you've had a long holiday. (*As scene continues, he takes out a number of things, books, tobacco jar, pipes and a pair of white cricket boots.*)

RAINBOW (*lugubriously*): Holiday! I've had mice in the music-room, dry rot in one of the class-rooms and beetles all over my basement.

TASSELL: Sounds most unpleasant. (*With a resigned grin*) Same old Rainbow, I can see that, and same old Hilary Hall. Might as well get used to it, I suppose.

RAINBOW (*mysteriously*): The same, yet not the same.

TASSELL (*looking up*): Mm?

RAINBOW: It won't be what it was—whatever it possibly may be, perhaps.

TASSELL (*confused*): Say that again.

RAINBOW (*profoundly*): Mark my words—two into one won't go. It isn't feasible.

TASSELL: What the hell are you talking about?

RAINBOW: I'm sorry, Mr. Tassell—but I can't go over the head of the Head.

TASSELL: Sounds to me as if you'd gone off the head of the head.

RAINBOW: I'm telling you confidential, he says to me.

TASSELL: Who says?

RAINBOW: Mr. Pond says.

TASSELL (*enlightened*): Oh—and you can't go over Mr. Pond's head.

RAINBOW (*patiently*): The head's head, that's what I said.

[*Billings comes down the stairs and into the room. He is in the thirties, has a cynical disposition and a dry way of talking. He is carrying an armful of personal belongings, among them a folded scarf (wool) in the Hilary Hall colours of red and yellow, cap and gown similar to Tassell's and a folding leather frame to take four photographs.*]

BILLINGS (*as he enters*): I say, Rainbow, my bedroom door's locked . . .

TASSELL: Hullo, R.B.

BILLINGS (*pleased to see him*): So the prodigal son is home again. (*Shaking hands*) I thought I heard a

faint whisper of your arrival. (*To Rainbow*) You might unlock it when you go up, and take my cases in. I left 'em on the landing.

[*Rainbow opens his mouth to say something, but as Billings goes on he gets no chance.*]

(*To Tassell*) Well, how are you? Don't tell me—we'll save all that for the long summer evenings. (*Picking up Tassell's cricket bat*) The weapons of peace once more. Glad to see you're well armed.

TASSELL: I suppose you've been taking games in my absence.

BILLINGS (*dryly*): I have. For that reason, if no other, I'm delighted to see you back.

TASSELL (*to Rainbow*): How's the pitch, by the way?

RAINBOW: It's all right now. What it'll be in a week's time it's not for me to say.

TASSELL (*glancing out of the window*): The weather looks all right to me.

RAINBOW (*shaking his head*): It's the other, I'm referring to. Grass needs a rest, same as we all do. After all—it's only human. (*He shakes his head and picking up Tassell's cases—moves out and up the stairs.*)

[*Tassell looks after him curiously. Billings is sorting his things, which he has deposited on centre table.*]

TASSELL: You know, I think old Rainbow's beginning to go at the edges.

BILLINGS (*crossing to locker D.R.*): Can't be. Nothing to go. (*He opens locker to put in some books and takes out, to his surprise, a pair of boxing gloves*) How the devil did these get in there?

TASSELL: You confiscated them from Hopcroft last term—my last term, I mean.

BILLINGS (*remembering*): So I did. Five years ago. You've got a memory. Little blighter was wearing them in chapel—for a bet. (*Drops gloves on table.*)

TASSELL: He's been saying the most extraordinary things.

BILLINGS: Hopcroft?

TASSELL: No—Rainbow. Seems to think something funny's going to happen here.

BILLINGS: Be the first time it ever has. (*Takes things from table to locker D.R.*)

TASSELL (*collecting his own things and putting them in locker*): Hopcroft's left by now, I suppose?

BILLINGS: Oh. Yes. But his borther's here; Hopcroft Mi. The same thing, only a good deal worse. (*Finds stick of rock in locker*) Ugh!

TASSELL: Another pre-war confiscation?

[*Billings nods and is about to put it back in locker, locking his sticky fingers . . .*]

BILLINGS: Oh. It's my favourite. (*He pockets it.*)

TASSELL (*slings the boxing gloves into one of the arm-chairs and sighs*): Thirteen weeks in the heart of darkest Hampshire. First term back seems a bit of a grisly prospect . . .

BILLINGS: You should have been with us for the last fifteen terms.

TASSELL (*nodding*): Rainbow said you'd been evacuated.

BILLINGS: That's putting it mildly. We were moved three times. The first was a boarding house—St. Moritz.

TASSELL (*surprised*): Switzerland?

BILLINGS: No. Swiss Cottage. We then went to share a Veterinary College.

TASSELL: You mean with a whole lot of animals?

BILLINGS: Yes. But to prevent any misunderstanding we were always referred to as their honoured guests. We were finally sent to a disused fire station near Ludlow. Up the pole to bed every night. Thank heaven to be back in Hampshire!

TASSELL: Well, I don't know . . . Twelve miles to

the nearest flick, forty to a theatre, and as for feminine society—nil.

BILLINGS: There's always Mrs. Hampstead.

TASSELL: Mrs. Hampstead may be the matron of this school, but she is certainly not feminine. Female, possibly. Feminine, certainly not. Damn it, she's got an R.A.F. moustache.

BILLINGS (*nodding*): Better known as Hampstead Heath. Yes, there is that, I admit.

TASSELL: It's all very well for you—you hate women anyway.

BILLINGS: If you had to live with four aunts, all wanting to mother you . . . look what they've done this time. (*He picks up the scarf and lets it unroll. It is of prodigious length.*)

TASSELL: Great Scott!

BILLINGS (*eyeing it gloomily*): They did a yard each.

TASSELL (*feeling the material*): A little warm, isn't it, for the summer term?

BILLINGS: They were knitting it for next winter, but I stopped them at the end of the March quarter. (*He rolls up the scarf from the top.*)

TASSELL (*has picked up the folding photograph frame and is looking at it curiously*): This is new, isn't it? The portrait gallery?

BILLINGS (*sadly*): Last birthday. And they always make sure I pack it.

TASSELL (*looking at photographs*): So this is the Big Four.

BILLINGS (*nodding, as he comes across*): Reading from left to right. Aunts Flora, Nora, Dora and Auntie Ethel.

TASSELL: Why Ethel?

BILLINGS: I don't think my grandmother expected her.

[*Pond enters from study, D.L. He is a small, pompous man of about fifty, dressed in a dark suit. He is*

carrying a letter, a telegram and some papers, school lists, etc.]

POND: Ah - good afternoon, gentlemen.

BILLINGS: Afternoon, Headmaster.

TASSELL: Hallo, sir.

POND (*shaking hands with Tassell*): Return of the warrior? Splendid. And delighted to be back in harness, I've no doubt?

TASSELL: Oh yes, rather.

[*Billings eyes Tassell dryly.*]

POND: Capital. We have all pulled together in the past. I am sure we shall continue to do so in the circumstances about to prevail.

BILLINGS: In the what?

POND: Ah—of course, you haven't heard the news. It was very sudden indeed. In fact, I've had no time to inform the parents as yet.

TASSELL: Nothing bad, sir, I hope?

POND: No, no—inconvenient, shall we say? No more. (*Opening letter*) I received the following two days ago, from the Ministry of Devacuation. (*Reading*) "Dear Sir." (*To Billings and Tassell*) Sit down. (*Reading again*) "Under the Emergency Powers Act, 1940, Sub-section 3, Para. 15 (Schools-Boarding and Private, Elementary and Preparatory, Secondary, Kindergarten and Grammar), this Ministry is empowered to allocate educational premises. Some schools returning from evacuation have, unfortunately, lost their original buildings, and it has become unavoidably necessary to ask you to share your own with another school of similar size and type. You will receive a further communication in due course. Your obedient servant, C. C. Fraphampton, Deputy Sub-Controller of Premises, Schools Division."

TASSELL: So that's what Rainbow was blithering about—two into one won't go . . .

POND: You know what these Ministries are—their yea is yea and their nay is nay.

BILLINGS: In due course, he says, doesn't he? That's probably two or three years. Very likely it'll never happen.

POND: It *has* happened. Yesterday afternoon this wire came from Hastings. (*Reading telegram*) "Staff and pupils arriving 4.15 tomorrow. Whitchurch, Principal of St. Swithin's." (*Hands them telegram to look at.*)

TASSELL (*curiously*): St. Swithin's . . .

BILLINGS: Now I suppose it'll rain for forty days.

POND (*severely, as he takes back the telegram*): This is hardly the time for Fourth Form humour, Billings. Staff and pupils at 4.15. That's only a few minutes after our own boys arrive. Before then, we've got to get everything settled. Accommodation, of course, will be the principal problem. Perhaps one of you'd take down the details. Billings . . . (*He gives a notebook to Billings*) I propose to put you in Mrs. Hampstead's room.

BILLINGS (*outraged*): What! (*Hands notebook to Tassell.*)

POND: You and Tassell. It's a large, airy room . . .

BILLINGS: Yes, and she's a large, hairy woman . . .

POND: Mrs. Hampstead's peculiarities are neither here nor there.

BILLINGS: They may not be here, but they will be there.

TASSELL: Surely we shan't be as overcrowded as all that?

POND: It will be a severe squeeze for everyone.

BILLINGS: Well, I refuse to do any squeezing in Mrs. Hampstead's room. I'd rather go back to my aunts.

POND (*pained*): Billings, if you're going to be unreasonable from the start . . .

BILLINGS: Unreasonable!

POND: Mrs. Hampstead agreed most readily.

BILLINGS: Oh—did she?

POND: She made no difficulties whatever about moving into your room.

BILLINGS: Into mine? (*Realising*) Oh. Objection overruled.

TASSELL: Same here.

POND (*eyeing them reprovingly*): We must try to remember that we are the hosts on this occasion. St. Swithin's are our honoured guests. Kindly bear that in mind.

BILLINGS (*ominously*): Honoured guests.

POND: Now—we've got matron in your room and you two in hers. (*To Tassell*) Make a note of that.

[*Tassell makes note.*]

That leaves Tassell's room free for the St. Swithin's staff.

TASSELL: They'll certainly have a squeeze.

POND (*correcting himself*): For one of their staff. I'm not quite certain about the rest. There are no more rooms in the staff wing . . .

BILLINGS (*casually*): Except yours, of course.

POND (*taken aback*): Mine?

BILLINGS: It's the largest and airiest of the lot. Quite a few of them could sleep with you in there.

POND: Not with someone in my position.

BILLINGS (*curiously*): What position d'you sleep in?

POND: My position as headmaster.

TASSELL (*eagerly*): Well, perhaps you could just share with their headmaster—Whitechapel or whatever his name is?

POND (*firmly*): I suggest we leave the question of my room for the moment. We must avoid favouritism at all costs. I hope that's quite clear?

TASSELL: Oh, absolutely.

BILLINGS: Clear as crystal. (*He takes stick of rock from his pocket and starts chewing it.*)

POND: Good. Well, then—it occurred to me we could probably sleep most of their masters in the carpenter's shop . . . How does that strike you?

TASSELL: I think you've hit the nail on the head, head.

BILLINGS: Convenient too—they could make their beds and then lie on them.

POND (*dryly*): There will be no shortage of beds. We have all those camp ones in the loft. We can set . . . (*He sees Billings chewing rock. Billings hastily conceals it*) We can set up the requisite number in the carpenter's shop and the remainder will do for the boys.

BILLINGS (*surprised*): Our boys?

POND: No, no—theirs, naturally. The only quest . . . (*Billings is chewing again. Pond exasperatedly confiscates the rock*) give me that. (*Puts rock in his own pocket*) The only question is, where to put them. Our boys could give up one of the dormitories, I suppose . . .

BILLINGS: Seems a pity to move them.

POND: Just what I was thinking. But where else could they go . . . ? there isn't anywhere.

BILLINGS: That passage in C wing is fairly wide, and there are doors at both ends . . .

POND: So there are. Excellent idea. (*He absently takes stick of rock from pocket and starts to chew it.*)

TASSELL (*mildly surprised*): C Wing? Outside the stinks room, d'you mean?

POND (*with his mouth full*): Don't be irrelevant, Tassell, please. If the passage in question runs past the scientific . . . (*Has trouble with mouthful of rock*) . . . laboratories, what of it? It may be a little awkward for our science classes but we must put up with these things.

BILLINGS (*to Tassell*): After all, St. Swithin's are our honoured guests.

TASSELL (*writing*): "Masters—Carpenter's shop. Boys—passage outside stinks."

BILLINGS: Any over can always sleep inside.

POND: That's true.

TASSELL (*sarcastically*): And I suppose they can all use the sinks as wash-basins.

POND: Which sinks?

TASSELL: The sinks in the stinks.

POND: So they can. I'm glad you thought of that. I was afraid they might have to do without. (*He deposits rest of rock on centre table and wipes fingers on Billings' scarf*) So much for sleeping quarters. Now for meals. As far as I can see, cook will simply have to stagger them.

BILLINGS: That won't be difficult.

TASSELL (*to Pond*): I don't quite follow, sir.

POND: Simple enough. We shall have a first and second service.

TASSELL: Oh—like the railways?

BILLINGS (*dryly*): First service hot, second—cold.

POND: Oh. I was proposing the same menu for each.

BILLINGS (*looking at him meaningly*): So was I.

POND: Ha. I see your point. Well, I expect they'd like to lunch at one, so as a matter of courtesy we might take the first service. At twelve-thirty.

[*Billings nods, indicates to Tassell to make a note of it.*]

Next—classrooms. (*Grudgingly*) I'm afraid we shall have to allot them some of those.

TASSELL: Unless, of course, they worked a night shift or something.

POND: There's no need to be flippant. I have the classrooms worked out already. It involves a certain amount of general post, but that's inevitable. (*Finding relevant list*) I suggest as follows: (*Reading rapidly*) "Upper Fourth combines with Lower Fifth. Lower Third to Upper Fourth's room. Upper Fifth and Middle Fourth to Upper Third.

Fifth to Sixth and vice versa." I think that's quite straightforward.

BILLINGS: Oh, quite.

TASSELL (*a little dizzy*): What about Remove?

POND: Remove stays where it is. Oh, one other point. I'm afraid St. Swithin's' staff will have to use this common room. There's no alternative to that.

BILLINGS: What about your study?

TASSELL: Don't be silly—Mr. Pond'll be sharing that with Whitechapel.

BILLINGS: Of course—I hadn't thought of that.

POND (*unhappily*): Neither had I.

[*Rainbow enters U.R.*]

RAINBOW (*to Pond*): Beg pardon, sir—the bus is just arriving.

POND (*preoccupied*): Ah—bring it in, thank you, Rainbow. (*Realising*) Oh. I mean there are two parcels of books on it, for me. Just put them in my study.

RAINBOW: Two parcels of books. In the study. Yes, sir.

[*Exit Rainbow U.R.*]

POND (*hurriedly*): Billings—Tassell—see the boys in, will you?

[*As they move towards double doors, Pond pauses having thought of something.*]

Oh, and by the by, you'd better prepare them for the coming—ah—invasion. I shall, of course, address the school after roll-call, but in the meantime—you might just impress upon them that—er . . .

BILLINGS (*nodding*): Honoured guests.

TASSELL: No favouritism.

POND: Exactly. (*Briskly*) Now, I must go and talk

to Mrs. Hampstead about the stinks in the sinks . . .
I mean . . . er . . . vice versa.

[*Exit Pond.*]

TASSELL: I say, R.B., what are you going to say to your lot?

BILLINGS: I shall suggest that they give our honoured guests a very warm welcome.

[*Exeunt Billings and Tassell U.R.*]

[*Miss Whitchurch and Miss Gossage pass the window—glance in—and appear at front door. Miss Whitchurch, a formidable woman of about fifty, is severely dressed in travelling clothes. Miss Gossage, hearty and bespectacled, with a red, scrubbed looking face, is in the middle thirties, runs to tweeds and sensible shoes. Miss Whitchurch knocks imperiously on the knocker of the front door (open).*]

WHITCHURCH (*calling*): Hullo! Someone! (*There is no answer, so she marches into the common room, followed by Miss Gossage. They look around them, not impressed.*) The staff common room, I can only suppose. Huh! Encouraging! Outside—no answer. In here—no staff.

GOSSAGE: Not very homey-from-homey, is it?

WHITCHURCH: I've warned you, my dear Gossage, one cannot expect other schools to provide the comforts of St. Swithin's.

GOSSAGE: Oh, I know, Miss Whitchurch—still I think they should make an effort. After all, atmosphere's jolly important.

WHITCHURCH: So is someone to answer the door. (*Going U.R. to double doors and glancing out*) Hey there! Cooee! (*Angrily*) Oh, Cooee!! (*Returning to above chair R.*) The place is badly run—that's quite evident. We shall have to put a stop to that. Idle servants beget an idle staff. It spreads to the girls,

and before you know where you are your moral tone is in ribbons. (*Running finger along dusty mantel-piece*) Look at that—*inches thick.*

GOSSAGE (*looking at dust on bookcase*): I say! You can write your name on it. (*Does so as she speaks*)

G—O—S—S—

WHITCHURCH (*a little dryly*): Why bother? (*Glancing at watch*) The girls will be here before we have even broken the ice. Did you see our luggage on to the bus?

GOSSAGE: Miss Harper took charge of it. (*Looking round again*) You wouldn't think any mistresses worth their salt would tolerate such a barracky old comm. Still, I expect we can soon jollify it up a bit.

WHITCHURCH: The room possibly. Its occupants—I very much fear the worst. Anyone content to live amid . . . (*She breaks off as her eye catches sight of the stick of rock. She picks it up, gingerly.*) (*Disgusted*) Now I'm sure of the worst. Sucked at both ends!

GOSSAGE: What is it?

WHITCHURCH (*peering at end, with distaste*): It says "Ilfracombe". (*Handing it to Miss Gossage*) Put it in the waste paper basket.

[*Gossage goes to put it in waste paper basket. Has trouble dislodging it, but eventually succeeds.*]

WHITCHURCH (*now looking at cricket things*): Cricket, I see.

GOSSAGE: Yes. You know, I'm afraid we shall have trouble with some of the girls. Net-ball in summer makes them absolutely melt.

WHITCHURCH (*pained*): I thought that subject was closed, Miss Gossage. Melt or not, St. Swithin's has always played net-ball, winter and summer. Cricket is no game for growing girls.

GOSSAGE: Most colls play it nowadays.

WHITCHURCH: If other schools choose to ruin their girls' figures, let them do so. Cricket thickens the

biceps, enlarges the bust and makes for very large hands and feet.

GOSSAGE: We don't really know that it does.

WHITCHURCH (*acidly*): Don't we? Look at these. (*Picks up Tassell's cricket boots.*)

GOSSAGE: Perhaps you're right, Miss Whitchurch.

WHITCHURCH: Of course I'm right. (*Gives the boots to Miss Gossage to put down*) They're big enough for Don Bradshaw or Bradfield or whatever his name is . . .

[*As Miss Gossage bends down to place boots on the floor, she sees Hopcroft's boxing gloves on the arm-chair.*]

GOSSAGE (*stares at gloves in amazement. In a puzzled tone*): Miss Whitchurch . . . (*Picks up gloves and hands them to her to look at.*)

WHITCHURCH (*stunned*): Pugilism! (*She takes them, gingerly.*)

GOSSAGE: You don't suppose they teach it here?

WHITCHURCH: Well I don't suppose they wear them for walks. Of course, self-defence is invaluable to any girl—but of a ladylike kind . . .

GOSSAGE (*nodding*): After all, my ju-jitsu classes are equal to anything.

WHITCHURCH: Well, that explains the cricket, anyway. After a pummelling with these, I doubt if the girls have any figures left worth bothering about . . .

[*As Rainbow enters U.R. with a large and heavy parcel of books, Miss Whitchurch hurriedly drops the gloves on to the table. Rainbow pauses in surprise.*]

(*Coldly*) Good afternoon.

RAINBOW: Good afternoon, Madam.

WHITCHURCH: You are the school porter I take it?

RAINBOW: Porter and groundsman.

WHITCHURCH: Name?

RAINBOW (*taken aback*): I beg your pardon?

WHITCHURCH: Your name? We might as well know it now as later.

RAINBOW (*looking at her curiously*): The name, Madam, is Rainbow.

WHITCHURCH (*after a moment*): Well, you can't help that. I hope in future you will answer the door more promptly.

RAINBOW (*defensively*): I was out the front, Madam, getting . . .

WHITCHURCH: That will do. Qui s'excuse, s'accuse.

RAINBOW: I beg your pardon?

WHITCHURCH: Granted—on this occasion. I want to see the Principal immediately.

RAINBOW: The Head, you mean?

WHITCHURCH: The Principal of Hilary Hall. As soon as possible.

RAINBOW: The Head's busy just at the moment—with Matron. If you wouldn't mind waiting, Madam . . . (*Moves L. behind Miss Gossage.*)

WHITCHURCH: Just one moment.

[*Rainbow pauses at door L.*]

Before seeing the Principal, there is one thing I should like to know . . .

RAINBOW: Yes, Madam?

WHITCHURCH: How many mistresses have you?

RAINBOW (*outraged*): I am a bachelor, Madam, in every sense of the word.

[*Exit Rainbow to study D.L.*]

[*Miss Whitchurch and Miss Gossage look after him curiously.*]

GOSSAGE: What a rum sort of porter!

WHITCHURCH: Glandular trouble. The man is obviously at the awkward age.

GOSSAGE: Seems a funny sort of school altogether. I wonder what the Principal's like.

WHITCHURCH: I don't look forward at all to finding out. Anyone who could employ a man like that . . . but what can't be cured must be endured. I shall keep myself as aloof as possible. You, Miss Harper, and the girls will do the same.

GOSSAGE: Yes, Miss Whitchurch.

[Rainbow re-enters from study and crosses to double doors. As he does so he looks curiously at Miss Whitchurch and Miss Gossage. They return the look with interest.]

[Exit Rainbow towards school.]

And I think the girls had better have an extra hour each week for ju-jitsu.

GOSSAGE: Yes, Miss Whitchurch.

WHITCHURCH (*impatiently*): Well, I don't know how much longer this woman's going to be. Perhaps we'd better have a look round on our own and take stock of the accommodation.

GOSSAGE: It doesn't look a very large building for two schools.

WHITCHURCH: No. We shall need considerably quite three-quarters of it. I intend to let them know exactly how much we want—cut and dried and no nonsense. One must be firm at the start or . . .

[She breaks off as Rainbow reappears with the second parcel of books. Again they exchange suspicious looks. Rainbow crosses to study and—exit into study.]

I suppose one can learn ju-jitsu at any age?

GOSSAGE (*enthusiastically*): Oh, yes, rather.

WHITCHURCH: I may make it compulsory for the staff as well.

GOSSAGE: Yes, Miss Whitchurch.

WHITCHURCH: Come along, Gossage. Let's investigate this curious establishment. I very much doubt if it's even an approved school.

[*Exeunt Miss Gossage and Miss Whitchurch in the direction of the school.*]

[*Rainbow enters again from the study. He is surprised to find the room now empty. He shrugs his shoulders and starts towards double doors. Pond comes down the stairs and enters.*]

POND: Did you bring them in?

RAINBOW: No, sir. They come of their own accord.

POND (*severely*): Don't be sarcastic, Rainbow, please. Where are they?

RAINBOW: Gone of their own accord, too, it seems. Daft, if you ask me, sir, the pair of them.

POND (*exasperated*): What are you talking about, Rainbow? Are those books in my study or are they not?

RAINBOW: The books are. The ladies aren't.

POND: What ladies?

RAINBOW: There was two of them, sir. I think they was wanting. And they was wanting you too, sir.

POND: I'm expecting no one.

RAINBOW (*with gloomy satisfaction*): Ah. Then perhaps that's why they've gone.

[*Pond nods and goes off into study.*]

[*Rainbow is about to go, when Billings and Tassell enter from the school, U.R.*]

BILLINGS (*seeing Rainbow*): So this is where you're skulking. Tuck boxes. The bus driver refuses to bring them in single handed.

RAINBOW (*nodding, gloomily*): They didn't ought to be allowed. Wicked, them things are. I strained my stomach once with a tuck box.

TASSELL (*grinning*): Funny—so did I.

RAINBOW: Bound with iron at the corners, it was.

TASSELL (*ruefully*): That's just what it felt like.

RAINBOW (*moving to double doors*): And forty-six of 'em to bring in.

BILLINGS (*cheerfully*): Not this afternoon.

[*Rainbow, crossing Billings towards door, turns round.*]

You'll have the St. Swithin's ones too.

RAINBOW: Murder, that's what it is.

[*Rainbow gives Billings a look and goes out towards the school, closing the doors behind him.*]

TASSELL: Well, the little blighters look as healthy as always.

BILLINGS (*looking at bookcase*): What the devil's this?

TASSELL: What's that?

BILLINGS: Something written in the dust—gossage. (*He pronounces it as though it were French.*)

TASSELL: What's gossage?

BILLINGS: I don't know. Must be some new rude word Rainbow picked up in the holidays.

TASSELL: Well, how did your lot take the news?

BILLINGS: About St. Swithin's? (*Tassell nods*) With characteristic British phlegm.

TASSELL: Same here. Except for a certain amount of jubilation that it might mean one bath a week instead of two.

BILLINGS (*calmly*): I expect the little blighters will be at each other's throats in the first five minutes.

TASSELL (*picking up boxing gloves with a grin*): Better pass these on to Hopcroft Mi—If his brother's left, I suppose they're his property now.

BILLINGS: If 'Hopcroft Mi doesn't take to St. Swithin's he won't be bothered by any Queensberry rules—something rude, swift and below the belt is more in his line. That boy needs a firm hand—very firm—and this term ~~he~~ he's going to get it.

[*There is a knock at the double doors.*]

Come in.

[*The door opens and Hopcroft Mi appears in the doorway. He is an untidy boy of about twelve with a deceptively innocent air.*]

(*Fiercely*) Yes, Hopcroft, what is it?

HOPCROFT (*comes downstage. He has a worried look on his face*): Please, sir, there's two strange ladies in the one downstairs.

BILLINGS: ~~In~~ the what?

HOPCROFT: The downstairs washroom, sir. There's two strange ladies in it.

[*Tassell and Billings exchange glances.*]

BILLINGS: Hopcroft minor, I don't want to chastise you on the first day of term . . .

TASSELL (*severely*): Vulgar without being funny.

HOPCROFT: But it's true, sir, honestly it is. There's a rummy looking one with spectacles on, and another rummy one without. They've both got hats on.

BILLINGS: Fifty lines. By to-morrow evening.

HOPCROFT: But, sir . . .

[*The study door opens and Pond enters D.L. slowly, looking at a letter he is holding.*]

HOPCROFT (*hastily*): Yes, sir. What am I to write, sir?

BILLINGS: "I must not be vulgar without being funny."

POND (*looking up*): I beg your pardon.

BILLINGS (*hurriedly to Hopcroft*): I mean—Caesar—Gallic War. First chapter.

HOPCROFT: Yes, sir.

[*Exit Hopcroft U. R.*]

POND: An imposition already?

BILLINGS: You know what young Hopcroft is. It's an improvement on last term, anyway. I had to

give him one then before we even left the station.
POND (*nodding*): A very difficult boy. One of the new boys—Sowter, the name is—I've had a letter from his mother—she asks particularly that the boy should *not* be pampered.

TASSELL: That's a bit unusual, isn't it?

POND: Young Sowter has been at one of those advanced schools. Girls of all ages. Preparatory for boys.

BILLINGS: Sounds very advanced.

POND: Possibly. Yet the boy is backward in his work . . .

TASSELL: I'm not surprised. (*Cross D.S.L.*)

POND: The parents look to us to eradicate any traces of feminine influence.

BILLINGS: Leave him to me.

TASSELL (*with feeling*): I shouldn't worry. He'll have to look a long way for feminine influence in this part of the world.

POND (*approvingly*): Quite. I was happy to write and assure Mrs. Sowter that the teaching staff here is entirely male—and bachelors into the bargain. I quoted her the school motto—"Homo in Omnibus"—"A Man in all Things".

TASSELL (*pleased to be enlightened*): So that's what it means. I always used to think it was something to do with straphanging.

[*Before Pond can comment on this, Barbara Cahoun enters by the front door and double doors U.R. behind them. She is a self-confident, hearty girl of fourteen, in the St. Swithin's school outfit. She is carrying a tennis racquet, a camera in a leather case, and a light mackintosh.*]

BARBARA: I say, excuse me . . .

[*They all turn startled.*]

(*Coming downstage*) Do you know—is this the staff common room?

POND: It is.

BARBARA: Thanks awfully. (*Enthusiastically*) Miss Harper let me carry her things in from the bus.

BILLINGS: Miss Harper . . . ?

BARBARA: Yes—she's awfully decent, like that. Well—in fact she's really absolutely top score altogether, actually.

[*She looks around for somewhere to put the things—sweeps Billings' things off the table into one of the chairs and carefully puts Miss Harper's belongings on the table. The others look on in amazement. Barbara beams at them and starts for the double doors.*]

POND (*suddenly jerking out of his astonishment*): Here—girl—young lady—just a moment please!

BARBARA (*pausing*): I can't stop more than a sec. If I'm caught jawing in here I'll be given a miss.

BILLINGS: Given a miss?

BARBARA (*patiently*): Misconduct mark. They're awfully strict at St. Swithin's. You get one for practically anything.

TASSELL

BILLINGS } Did you say St. Swithin's?

POND

BARBARA (*nodding*): I suppose you're Hilary Hall. They don't let parents come down on our first day—rotten, isn't it? I say, I must fly, really . . .

POND (*firmly*): Wait—please. Are we to understand that you are a pupil at St. Swithin's?

BARBARA (*nodding*): I'm in the Lower Fifth. Barbara Cahoun. *Not* spelt Colquhoun.

BILLINGS (*disgustedly*): Do you mean to say they have girls at St. Swithin's?

BARBARA (*giggling*): Well, I should hope so—it's a girl's school.

TASSELL: It's *what*?

POND (*staggered*): It can't be!

BILLINGS: Of course it can't. (*Eyeing Barbara dryly*) This is a female Hopcroft of some sort. (*To Barbara*) Can you truthfully stand there and tell us that St. Swithin's, Hastings, is a girls' school?

BARBARA: No. St. Leonards.

BILLINGS (*triumphantly, to others*): There you are.

TASSELL (*to Barbara*): You said St. Swithin's just now.

BARBARA: St. Swithin's, St. Leonards. St. Swithin's, Hastings is boys. We're St. Swithin's, St. Leonards. And we're girls. It's quite easy really. So long.

[*Exit Barbara to school. The three look after her in utter consternation.*]

POND (*aghast*): You don't suppose she's telling the truth?

BILLINGS (*moving U. L.*): We can easily find out—there's a schools directory in here somewhere—

POND: The wire came from Hastings—of that I'm positive.

BILLINGS (*finding directory*): Here we are. (*Turning pages*) St. Leonards—see Hastings and St. Leonards. They're both under the same heading.

TASSELL: That explains the wire.

BILLINGS (*reading*): "Hastings and St. Leonards". (*Moving finger down page*) "S—S—here we are—" "St. Alfred's, St. Arthur's, St. Bride's—"

POND (*impatiently*): S—you want.

BILLINGS: I'm looking under S.

TASSELL: Saint S, he means. S.S.

BILLINGS: Don't hiss at me—here we are—St. Swithin's—Boys—Boarding.

POND: Boys. There. That's the one in the wire, of course.

BILLINGS: "Headmaster—O. J. Philpott". And that *isn't* the one in the wire.

TASSELL: No. That was old Whitechapel.

BILLINGS (*reading on*): "St. Swithin's—Girls—Boarding. Principal—Miss Evelyn Whitchurch, M.A. Oxon. (*Grimly*) Well, that seems to settle it.
POND (*staring at book*): But it's impossible—we can't have a girls' school here.

BILLINGS: You've got one.

TASELL: The Ministry must have put its foot in it.

BILLINGS: And their yea is yea and their nay is nay.

POND (*agitatedly*): We must do something post haste—contact the Ministry before they arrive.

BILLINGS: They *have* arrived. You saw that Cahoun thing—not spelt Colquhoun. And that's only a sample. There'll be girls and mistresses all over the place.

TASELL: Committing misconduct marks in all directions!

BILLINGS: We'll be engulfed in' hockey and cocoa!

POND (*groaning*): Great heaven forbid! (*Suddenly remembering*) The wanting women!

BILLINGS: The what?

POND: Two of them—and Rainbow said they were looking for me.

BILLINGS: One with spectacles on and one without.

TASELL: And they've both got hats on.

POND: Heaven knows! But if one's that Whitchurch woman—and she's at large—goodness knows what she might be up to. She may be anywhere!

[*Exit Pond U. R.*]

BILLINGS (*hurries to the doors and calls after him*): Try the one downstairs! (*Turning*) Well, this is a nice thing, I must say!

TASELL (*grinning*): So must I. The more I think about it, the nicer it seems. Here was I moaning about the lack of feminine society and what happens? St. Swithin's from sunny St. Leonards-on-Sea!

BILLINGS (*coldly*): I'm surprised at you.

TASSELL: What d'you mean?

BILLINGS: If your idea of feminine society ranges from seven years to fourteen—

TASSELL: Don't be a chump. It's mistresses I'm thinking of. (*Quickly*) School mistresses.

BILLINGS: Have you met any?

TASSELL (*thinking*): No. I don't think I have.

BILLINGS: I thought not. They fall into two groups—

TASSELL: All of them?

BILLINGS: All of them. Group one: The Battle Axe—baleful, brainy and belligerent. Group two: The Hearty Amazon—healthy, High School and hail-fellow-well-met.

TASSELL: Damn it, there must be some attractive ones.

BILLINGS: None.

TASSELL: What will you bet me?

BILLINGS: Anything you like. I can't lose. How much do you want on the St. Swithin's lot—five pounds?

TASSELL (*dubiously*): Well—five bob.

BILLINGS: Done. (*Picking up things on table*) And I may say there's going to be no "Women and Children first" nonsense where I'm concerned—male or female, they come in the honoured guests category and are going to be treated as such.

[*Billings dumps Miss Harper's belongings on to a chair, picks up his own things and starts to disentangle them on the table.*]

TASSELL: You go your way, I go mine. Personally, I shall extend to the St. Swithin's staff the outstretched hand of welcome. (*He gestures appropriately to the double doors.*)

[*As he does so, Pond enters from the school with Miss Whitchurch and Miss Gossage. Tassell looks con-*

siderably taken aback by their appearance as they stare icily. Billings grins.]

POND (*to Miss Whitchurch*): Allow me to introduce my staff. Mr. Billings—Modern Languages, History and Geography. Mr. Tassell—Science, English and Mathematics.

[Billings and Tassell incline their heads politely.]

(*To Billings and Tassell*) This is Miss Whitchurch, M.A.

BILLINGS: Oxon.

POND: Headmistress of St. Swithin's.

WHITCHURCH (*correcting him, severely*): Principal.

POND: I beg your pardon.

BILLINGS (*to Tassell*): Group one.

POND: And this is Miss Gossage—

BILLINGS and TASSELL (*to each other triumphantly*): Gossage! (*They again pronounce it the French way*).

GOSSAGE (*beaming*): Games, Mathematics, Botany, Drawing, Needlework, Handicraft and Extras. (*She wrings their hands painfully*).

TASSELL (*weakly, to Billings*): Group two?

[Billings nods triumphantly. Tassell takes another look at Miss Whitchurch and Miss Gossage and resignedly forks out five shillings. Miss Whitchurch and Miss Gossage are watching this transaction curiously.]

POND (*severely, clearing his throat*): This of course is our common staff—staff common room—

WHITCHURCH: Quite. I hope we shan't have to put up with it for long. (*As Pond looks askance*) The position is quite impossible. Sharing premises at all is distasteful enough—but with a boys' school! The matter must be rectified at once.

POND: I entirely agree.

BILLINGS (*hopefully*): There's a very good train back at five-twenty.

WHITCHURCH (*with a wintry smile*): It's hardly a matter of trains, I'm afraid. We shall have to find somewhere else to go.

POND: There's nowhere at St. Leonards?

WHITCHURCH (*amused*): St. Leonards? (*She laughs, lightly*) D'you hear that, Miss Gossage?

[*Miss Gossage utters a deep, solitary laugh.*]

WHITCHURCH (*to Pond*): St. Swithin's has not been at St. Leonards for five years. It'll be another year at least before we can go back. I went to see the building yesterday. It wasn't there. Flat. Quite flat.

GOSSAGE (*explaining*): We were evacuated to St. Phillippa's at St. Anne's, with St. Hilda's and St. Matilda's.

BILLINGS: Well, couldn't you go back there—from St. Pancras?

WHITCHURCH: No room. St. Phillippa's had to have their buildings back. You see, they'd been evacuated to St. Mary's at St. Ives, St. Mary's having gone to All Saints at Oxford. I don't know where All Saints went to.

BILLINGS: I've a pretty rough idea.

[*Joyce Harper enters from school at double doors. She is a very attractive girl in the early twenties. She is in travelling clothes and carries a small suitcase.*]

JOYCE (*advancing in some concern*): Miss Whitchurch—

WHITCHURCH: Ah, Miss Harper.

JOYCE: I think there must be something wrong—there's a crowd of small boys about the place, all staring with their mouths open wide, and not saying a word—

WHITCHURCH: There's been a slight misunderstanding at the Ministry. This is Mr. Pond, Principal of Hilary Hall.

POND (*retaliating*): Headmaster. (*He shakes hands with Foyce.*)

JOYCE (*understanding now*): It's a boys' school!

WHITCHURCH (*grimly*): Exactly. Where did you leave the girls?

JOYCE: They went upstairs with Matron.

WHITCHURCH (*aghast*): *Their* matron?

BILLINGS (*with mild sarcasm*): It's all right—she's a woman.

TASSELL: You might not think so, but she is.

WHITCHURCH (*glares and waves a hand in introduction. In a tone of some disparagement, to Foyce*): These are the remains of their staff, Mr.—er—

BILLINGS: Billings.

WHITCHURCH: Billings.

JOYCE: How do you do?

[*They shake hands. Before Miss Whitchurch has time to resume, Tassell presents himself eagerly.*]

TASSELL: Tassell.

JOYCE (*smiling as he shakes her hand warmly*): How d'you do?

TASSELL: Oh, fine, now, thanks. (*A little anxiously*) You really are on the staff of St. Swithin's?

JOYCE (*smiling*): Yes, Why not?

TASSELL: No reason at all. Absolutely none. (*Turns to Billings*) Group three, I think.

[*Billings looks at Foyce. He resignedly fishes out ten shillings and pays it to Tassell. Miss Whitchurch and Miss Gossage look increasingly surprised. Pond frowns.*]

TASSELL (*seeing them staring*): Just a small bet we had.

WHITCHURCH (*acidly*): Horses?

BILLINGS (*with a look at her*): The losers were.

WHITCHURCH (*severely*): As I was saying, the sooner we can find other quarters the better. (*To Pond*) I

shall telephone the Ministry at once. I suppose you are on the telephone out here?

POND (*with umbrage*): We are. In several places. Here, Matron's room, my study—

WHITCHURCH: Kindly conduct me to your study.

POND: This way.

[*Exit Pond and Whitchurch to study. Miss Gossage is glancing idly at the magazines on the small table. Joyce looks around for her belongings.*]

JOYCE: Did someone bring my things in?

TASSELL: Your things? Oh, rather—yes. We put them here, out of the way, for safety.

[*He picks up Joyce's things from the chair, sweeps Billings' belongings off the table again into Billings' hands, and puts Joyce's things carefully on the table.*]

JOYCE: Thank you so much.

BILLINGS: Yes, thank you so much.

JOYCE (*sorting things*): I suppose we shall be here for a day or two, anyway.

TASSELL: Oh, yes—several days or two, I hope.

JOYCE (*picking up suitcase*): I think I'll take this upstairs.

TASSELL (*eagerly*): You can't possibly manage it. (*Takes it from her*) Let me carry it for you.

GOSSAGE: We don't know where our bedroom will be.

BILLINGS: Second corridor on the left, far end.

TASSELL: Don't be silly, old boy, that's the carpenter's shop.

TASSELL (*to Joyce*): You're going to sleep in my room.

[*Joyce reacts.*]

I mean—well—come with me and I'll show you what I mean.

[*She reacts again, he hastily conducts her out and upstairs.*]

GOSSAGE: I say, Mr. Billings, I don't think much of your stuffy old comm.

BILLINGS (*surprised*): My what? (*He hurriedly looks at the things he is holding*) It isn't—it's a scarf.

GOSSAGE: The common room, I mean. We had a really topping den at St. Swithin's. But then, of course, men on their own are so helpless. (*Looking at scarf*) Are those the Hilary Hall colours?

BILLINGS: Blood and orange.

GOSSAGE: Ours are pale blue and puce.

BILLINGS (*disgusted*): Spiffing.

GOSSAGE: They are rather. (*A little coyly*) Of course, crimson is more my colour really.

BILLINGS: Oh, I wouldn't say that.

GOSSAGE (*picking up Tassell's cricket bat*): It's a pity we won't be staying—I hoped I might convert Miss Whitchurch to cricket. I've been trying for years, you know.

BILLINGS: A bit old for it, isn't she?

GOSSAGE: For the girls, I mean. Of course she's thinking of their figures, but I was an absolute demon for it and I can't see what she's afraid of, can you? (*She makes cricket strokes with bat.*)

BILLINGS (*with difficulty, after looking at her*): I can imagine.

GOSSAGE: My pater always said he thought I'd shape very well.

BILLINGS: We all make mistakes.

GOSSAGE: I'm so glad you agree. Perhaps before we go, I can try my hand on the pitch. I used to be quite a wizard at Yorkers play. But there, I expect you'd hit me for six.

BILLINGS (*with feeling*): I'd have a good try.

[*The door opens from the study. Miss Gossage hurried-*

ly thrusts the bat into Billings' hand as Miss Whitchurch enters, followed by Pond.]

GOSSAGE: Mr. Billings was just saying, Miss Whitchurch, that he thinks cricket would be a ripping thing for the girls.

BILLINGS (*hurriedly, as Miss Whitchurch glares*): What I really meant was—

POND (*crushingly*): Never mind that now, Billings, please. We've got other things to think of. (*Correcting himself in vexation*) Of which to think—all this is playing havoc with my grammar.

[*Rainbow comes into hall from school and starts to ring the school bell.*]

(*Distractedly*): Oh, my goodness.

[*Miss Whitchurch puts her fingers in her ears. Billings closes double doors to muffle the sound.*]

GOSSAGE (*shouting*): What did the Ministry say, Miss Whitchurch?

[*The bell stops.*]

(*Still shouting*): It's stopped. It's stopped.

WHITCHURCH (*taking fingers from ears*): There's no need to shout.

GOSSAGE: What did the Ministry say?

WHITCHURCH (*heatedly*): They won't even admit their mistake. They said I must be a boys' school—I'm on a blue card in the index. I spoke to three different grades of civil servants, telling them to change my colour immediately. They all refused. One of them had the impertinence to say he had no evidence as to my sex over the telephone.

GOSSAGE: One really wants a chin-wag with the men at the top.

[*Billings looks at her, pained.*]

WHITCHURCH (*annoyed*): The Controller is down

with flu, the sub-Controller is sitting on a Standing Committee, and the Deputy Sub-Controller, Mr. Fraphampton, has gone to a kindergarten in Wales. BILLINGS: About time, too, I should think.

WHITCHURCH: He'll be there till next Monday. Until then, nothing at all can be done.

POND (*nodding*): Just for a week, we shall have to accept the present state of affairs. (*To Miss Whitchurch*) Now, about accommodation—we haven't much to offer, I'm afraid—

WHITCHURCH (*briskly*): We shall cheerfully put up with the best you have.

POND (*swallowing*): Oh. Thank you. Well, now, I've made out a tentative list—

WHITCHURCH: I've made out a definite one. These are our exact requirements—no more, no less. (*Gives him a list—Pause. Pond looks at list unhappily*) It's quite clear, I hope?

POND: Oh, quite.

WHITCHURCH: May I see yours?

POND (*hastily*): I—ah—shouldn't bother. (*I joking helplessly at Billings*) A little too tentative. (*Tears up his own list.*)

[*Billings picks up W.P.B. and Pond drops torn list into it. Tassell and Joyce enter at double doors. Joyce has discarded her hat and coat.*]

TASSELL (*as they enter*): What's the news from the Ministry?

POND: Most disappointing.

TASSELL (*dismayed, to Miss Whitchurch*): You're going?

WHITCHURCH: On the contrary. We have to stay for at least a week.

TASSELL (*delighted*): A week! Oh, I say, that's terrible, isn't it?

[*Billings eyes him dryly.*]

GOSSAGE (*suddenly*): Jiminy!

POND: I beg your pardon?

GOSSAGE: What about the parents?

WHITCHURCH: *What* about the parents?

GOSSAGE: If I know anything of ours, they'll kick up an awful fuss when they find out.

BILLINGS: Ours will raise the devil.

POND: H'm—Yes. I hadn't thought of that.

[*Rainbow enters U. R. He looks a little worried.*]

RAINBOW (*to Pond*): Beg pardon, Sir—

POND (*abstractedly*): In a few minutes, Rainbow, please.

RAINBOW: Yes, sir.

[*Exit Rainbow U. R.*]

POND (*to others as Rainbow goes out*): Parents, yes—there's a pretty problem in that direction.

JOYCE: But it's nobody's fault—it's the Ministry's.

WHITCHURCH: Do you seriously think, Miss Harper, that parents are going to blame the Ministry? Parents *always* blame the school.

POND: Quite right.

WHITCHURCH (*indignantly*): What d'you mean—quite right?

POND: I'm not approving—I'm agreeing. Quite right.

TASSELL: The thing is—need they find out?

GOSSAGE: Letters home.

TASSELL: Not in the first week, surely?

WHITCHURCH: Every girl writes home twice a week regularly, Wednesdays and Saturdays.

JOYCE: And the first evening—to say they've arrived safely.

POND: There's only one way out. We must appeal to their sense of public duty—apart, of course, from censoring the correspondence.

WHITCHURCH: I shall do the same. It's the only way to prevent a leakage.

BILLINGS (*sarcastically*): Short of locking 'em all in and dictating a circular letter—

POND: hardly Oh, I think we need go as far as that.

[*Rainbow enters again, looking rather more worried.*]

RAINBOW (*to Pond*): Beg pardon, sir—

POND (*exasperatedly*): I asked you to wait, Rainbow.

[*Rainbow waits.*]

GOSSAGE: It's going to be a full time job, steaming all their letters open.

WHITCHURCH (*shocked*): Miss Gossage, you don't seriously suggest that St. Swithin's should stoop to steaming?

GOSSAGE: Well, I don't see how else it can be done.

WHITCHURCH: The girls will be told to leave their envelopes unstuck—on hygienic grounds.

POND: Personally, I prefer to be quite open about it. I shall tell the boys we intend to check their spelling.

BILLINGS: What could be more open than that?

[*Rainbow unable to control his agitation any longer, goes R. to table D. R. and starts to dial a number on telephone.*]

(*With satisfaction*) Well, I'm sure we shall all try to make the best of things—boys and girls, masters and mistresses.

WHITCHURCH: Hear! hear!

TASSELL (*looking at Foyce*): We certainly will, won't we, Miss Harper?

GOSSAGE: It may be rather a sticky wicket, but we'll toe the line and turn up trumps! Won't we, Mr. Billings?

[*She beams at Billings, who winces.*]

POND (*to Miss Whitchurch*): Suppose we shake on that. On behalf of Hilary Hall.

WHITCHURCH (*with dignity*): Floreat St. Swithin's.

[*They shake hands.*]

GOSSAGE (*to Joyce, heartily*): Floreat St. Swithin's.

BILLINGS (*to Tassell, mock heroically*): Homo in Omnibus.

RAINBOW (*into the telephone*): Hullo. Is that Doctor Hodges? I'm speaking from the school—

POND (*turning sharply*): Doctor Hodges—?

RAINBOW (*into telephone*): Yes—I'm afraid we're going to have some casualties—

WHITCHURCH (*aghast*): Casualties!

RAINBOW (*into telephone*): Yes—some of the pupils.

POND (*angrily*): Rainbow—explain yourself!

RAINBOW (*into telephone*): Just a minute, Doctor. (*To Pond*) I rung the tea-bell. The young ladies come in first. The young gentlemen didn't take very kindly to that. They're in the dining hall now—both lots.

GOSSAGE: Eating?

RAINBOW: Eating each other, if you ask me. There was only words at first, but after the first fishcake was thrown—

WHITCHURCH: They're throwing fishcakes!

RAINBOW (*with gloomy satisfaction*): And the sauce along with 'em.

[*There is a distant crash of crockery and children's voices.*]

(*With gloomy satisfaction*) They're getting warmed up now.

POND: Oh, my goodness!

WHITCHURCH: My girls!

[*They all start a rush for the double doors, except Rainbow and Billings.*]

GOSSAGE (*frantically*): Which way?

TASSELL: Follow me!

[As they scramble for precedence through the double doors, Barbara Caboun enters in the opposite direction (She has an envelope in her hand.)]

BARBARA: Please, where's the post box—?

POND (*pausing and snatching the letter*): No good—censored!

[They all sweep past her and out.]

BARBARA (*indignantly*): Hey!

[She dashes out in pursuit. Billings watches all this with sardonic enjoyment.]

RAINBOW (*into telephone*): Beg pardon, Doctor—I think there'll be one or two adults in addition—Thank you, Doctor. (*He rings off and starts to move out.*)

BILLINGS: Er—Rainbow—

[Rainbow pauses.]

You didn't happen to see who threw the first fish-cake?

RAINBOW: Hopcroft Minor.

BILLINGS (*grinning*): Ah. You might give him a message for me—

RAINBOW: A message, sir?

BILLINGS (*nodding*): Tell him I've cancelled those fifty lines.

[Exit Rainbow U. R. as Billings crosses to put his things in his locker, humming contentedly.]

[Curtain.]

ACT TWO

Three weeks later. Under Miss Gossage's influence the Common Room has been duly jollified. There is a bright arty-crafty cloth on the centre table, and a vase, full of rather weedy-looking wild flowers and long grasses. The armchairs have bright, arty cushions in them.

[Joyce is seated in one of the chairs, marking some school notebooks, Miss Gossage in the other, with mark-book on her knee, going through a pile of fancy needle-work. At the table, Billings and Tassell sit side by side censoring letters.]

TASSELL: This is an easy job. The little blighters write the same letter home every week. The only thing that changes is the date.

JOYCE (*smiling*): And the excuses for more pocket money.

BILLINGS (*exclaiming*): Well, I'm darned. That's the fourth time that boy's put "To Hell with St. Swithin's" after his signature. (*Undoing fountain pen.*)

TASSELL: He must be a sort of one man resistance movement.

JOYCE (*smiling*): How d'you cope with it?

BILLINGS: Blot it out. (*Shakes ink blots from pen onto letter*) After all, what's one blot more among so many?

TASSELL (*in disgust*): Talk about tact—listen to this one from young Sowter. (*Reading*) "Dear Mother and Father, This is a very nice school, Mr. Pond, the headmaster is nice. So is Mr. Billings. Mr. Tassell is very nice too. No more news now. Your loving son, Cyril. P.S. Matron is also very nice."

GOSSAGE (*looking at a frilly pair of pyjamas*): The Lower Third's fancy work is coming along like

billy-o. (*As she enters marks in book*) I'm giving Penelope Bagshott an alpha plus this week. (*Holding up pyjamas*) Look at these pyjees, aren't they absolutely tiptop?

BILLINGS (*dryly*): Corking.

GOSSAGE: The best little needlewoman in the whole lower school. (*Noticing something*) Oh, dear—she's made a fearful hash of her scallops. It'll have to be a minus after all. (*Searching in chair*) Where's my bungy?

BILLINGS (*wincing*): Where's her bungy? (*He makes to turn his head away in disgust, gets his face in the flowers.*)

GOSSAGE (*brightly*): We picked those this morning—on our nature study ramble.

BILLINGS: Next time I should go where the grass is shorter. (*He picks up the vase to move it.*)

GOSSAGE (*dismayed*): Oh—you're not going to move them? It's Old Man's Beard and Queen Anne's Lace.

BILLINGS: The Old Man's Beard is withered and Queen Anne's Lace is dead. (*Taking flowers from vase*) If you don't mind, therefore, I shall deposit them in the wagger-pagger-bagger. (*Drops flowers into waste paper basket.*)

GOSSAGE (*reproachfully*): You *are* a bear with a sore head. Must have got out of bed the wrong side.

TASSELL (*getting out cigarettes*): He did. Sore head was the result. He hit it on a vice.

BILLINGS (*bitterly*): As a bedroom, the carpenter's shop has it's disadvantages.

TASSELL: All the same, I don't know why you got out that side.

BILLINGS (*acidly*): Because on the other, I trod on a chisel.

[*Tassell offers him a cigarette and he takes one.*]

Thanks. Reminds me, I must get some new skin from Mrs. Hampstead.

GOSSAGE (*looking at a pair of knickers and shaking her head*): Her gussets are miles too large.

BILLINGS (*with umbrage*): Mrs. Hampstead's gussets are entirely a Hillary Hall affair.

GOSSAGE (*sweetly marking in a book*): These aren't Mrs. Hampstead's—they're Audrey Thomson's. Poor child. All thumbs. Quite apart from her gussets, she simply will not neaten her necklines properly, her smocking is shocking, and last week she had to untack every one of her tucks. (*Looking at wrist watch*) By Jove, it's getting on for netters time—I must dash up and change. (*She dumps needlework on end of table and hurries to double doors*) Cheerio!

[*Exit Gossage.*]

BILLINGS (*looks after her, then disgustedly pushes needlework as far away as possible*): Any change could only be for the better. (*Despairingly*) No more news from the Ministry, I suppose, Miss Harper?

JOYCE (*shaking her head*): None. Miss Whitchurch spoke to them this morning.

TASSELL (*cheerfully*): So did Pond. Same answer, as usual. Receiving immediate attention.

BILLINGS (*bitterly*): It's been receiving that for the last three weeks. (*Looking ahead of him*) Three weeks—of Audrey Thomson's gussets—sawdust in my bed—lunches consisting of cold hot-pot—

TASSELL (*reading letter*): Greedy little blighter—

BILLINGS: Now listen—

TASSELL: Not you. Hopcroft mi—writing home for another tin of Golden Syrup. He had a full one at tea time yesterday.

JOYCE (*amused*): Bang go another eight points.

WHITCHURCH (*off, approaching*): Mr. Pond!

BILLINGS (*in alarm*): Look out!

[*Billings and Tassell in a panic seek to hide their*

cigarettes—there is nowhere. They hurriedly drop them into the flower vase and try to fan the smoke away, as Miss Whitchurch comes in at front door, full of outraged indignation.]

WHITCHURCH (*as she enters by double doors*): Mr. Pond! Where's Mr. Pond? Where is he?

BILLINGS: He's in his study. (*Sarcastically*) He hoped you wouldn't mind.

[*Miss Whitchurch starts for the door in a determined manner. Suddenly she pauses and sniffs.*]

WHITCHURCH: Something's burning.

BILLINGS: His ears I expect.

WHITCHURCH (*sarcastically*): Ha! Ha! (*Calling*) Pond! (*She moves towards study.*)

TASSELL: I think he's correcting prep.

WHITCHURCH (*ominously*): I can't help that. He's got something else to correct now.

[*As she reaches door, it opens and Pond emerges. He is startled to see Miss Whitchurch advancing on him.*]

POND: Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Whitchurch—I wasn't meaning to trespass—

WHITCHURCH: It's an outrage!

POND: Oh, come, come now—I seldom do use the study—

WHITCHURCH (*impatiently*): Never mind the study. A gross misdemeanour has been committed.

POND: Misdemeanour?

WHITCHURCH: Against my girls. And one of your boys was responsible.

POND: Good heavens!

BILLINGS: Which one of your girls was it?

WHITCHURCH: Not one—all of them.

POND: Good gracious!

BILLINGS: Good going.

JOYCE: What's happened exactly?

TASSELL: Or can't you tell us?

WHITCHURCH (*formidably*): Someone has punctured their back tyres.

BILLINGS: Their what? (*Disappointed*) Oh—bicycles—

WHITCHURCH (*even more formidably*): And also tampered with their tool bags.

POND: Tampered?

WHITCHURCH: With treacle.

POND (*confused*): I thought you said with tool-bags.

WHITCHURCH (*exasperatedly*): With treacle *and* with tool-bags. A boy or boys has put treacle in the tool-bags of my girls.

[*Pond, Billings and Tassell all laugh uproariously, see Miss Whitchurch's expression and hastily check themselves. Joyce is also trying to conceal some amusement.*]

POND: Disgraceful—besides being a waste of treacle.

BILLINGS (*still half laughing*): In their tool-bags. That's a new one on me.

TASSELL (*involuntarily*): Golden syrup! Golden—

WHITCHURCH (*sharply*): I beg your pardon!

TASSELL (*hastily*): I mean—of course, it might have been—on the other hand, of course, it probably wasn't.

WHITCHURCH: I see no significance one way or another. Both are equally glutinous.

BILLINGS (*frowning at Tassell*): Of course they are. No significance at all.

WHITCHURCH: Unless, of course, it were a clue to the culprit. Have you any idea who it could have been?

BILLINGS: Us? Good Lord, no—none at all— (*He hastily picks up Hopcroft's letter and puts it in envelope. As he seals it*) Have we?

TASSELL: Absolutely none.

WHITCHURCH: Have you, Miss Harper?

[*Billings and Tassell look anxiously at Joyce.*]

JOYCE: I? No—I haven't the faintest.

[*Billings and Tassell breathe a sigh of relief.*]

POND: Come to think of it, there's no proof that our boys had anything to do with it.

BILLINGS: Of course there isn't.

WHITCHURCH (*scornfully*): As if proof were needed. Who else would have done such a thing?

POND: One of your girls might have.

WHITCHURCH: And treacle her own tool-bag? Poppycock! Besides—treacle isn't a girl's weapon. Is it, Miss Harper?

JOYCE (*honestly*): Well, as a matter of fact, Miss Whitchurch, I did know a case—

WHITCHURCH (*sharply*): That'll do, Miss Harper. (*Changing subject*) Have the girls' letters been censored yet?

JOYCE (*shaking her head*): They only began them after lunch.

WHITCHURCH: You'd better see if they've finished.

TASSELL (*hopefully to Joyce*): I was thinking—perhaps—when I've finished mine, I might—help you with yours—when I've finished mine—

JOYCE (*smiling*): That's very handsome of you.

TASSELL (*eagerly*): Am I? I mean is it? Then can I?

WHITCHURCH (*intervening*): I'm afraid *not*. (*Stiffly*) A young girl's disclosures are not always for masculine eyes.

TASSELL: Perhaps I could—just lick the envelopes—

WHITCHURCH: If you want to do so, yes.

TASSELL: Oh, thanks awfully. (*He nods and smiles at Joyce.*)

JOYCE: I'll get the letters immediately, Miss Whitchurch.

[*Joyce goes out to school, leaving notebooks in arm-chair.*]

WHITCHURCH (*To Pond*): Now, do you intend to track down the guilty party, or do you not?

POND: I shall investigate the matter thoroughly. (*He sits.*)

WHITCHURCH: At once?

POND (*wearily*): If you insist. (*He rises again.*)

WHITCHURCH: I do. What's more, I shall come with you.

POND: Must you?

WHITCHURCH: Yes, I must. This time we stick together.

[*She marches out at double doors, nodding to Pond to follow.*]

BILLINGS (*accusingly*): Disgusting!

TASSELL (*innocently*): What is?

BILLINGS: This Miss Harper business.

TASSELL: What do you mean?

BILLINGS (*disgustedly*): Lick her envelopes. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

TASSELL (*fervently*): She's the loveliest girl I've ever come across.

BILLINGS: She's a St. Swithin—that's enough for me.

TASSELL: By name but not by nature. Look at the way she didn't rat on Hopcroft mi—there was nothing Swithinish about that.

BILLINGS: The girl has some sporting instincts, I'll admit.

TASSELL: The girl has everything. She has looks—she has charm—she has brains—

BILLINGS: And now, I suppose, you hope she'll have you.

TASSELL (*rapturously*): If only she would. (*Worried*) The trouble is, I've got to work so fast. I'm scared stiff that before I have time to propose, the Ministry'll weigh in with a solution and off she'll go—out of my life for ever.

BILLINGS: That'll be the day.

TASSELL (*reproachfully*): Don't be a cad.

BILLINGS: I'm not. All I want is to see the back of St. Swithin's. If your love doesn't interfere with that—if youth calls to youth—male calls to female—it's no concern of mine.

TASSELL: I wouldn't be too sure.

BILLINGS: ~~What~~ d'you mean?

TASSELL: Miss Gossage. She's answered your call.

BILLINGS (*alarmed*): Don't be ridiculous.

TASSELL: You don't mean to say you haven't noticed the symptoms?

BILLINGS (*more alarmed*): Symptoms—?

TASSELL: Look at all these flowers and what not—

BILLINGS (*aghast*): What! Queen Anne's Beard or whatever it is—Old Man's Lace? Don't tell me it means something in the language of flowers?

TASSELL: She's trying to show you how homey she can make your little nest.

BILLINGS (*wailing*): Nest! Don't say things like that. (*Firmly*) You're trying to frighten me, that's what you're doing, If you think you can shift my attention from your treasonable passion for Miss Harper by raising these Gossage bogies, you're making a mistake. I haven't swallowed a word of it—not a single word—*His voice trails off as—*

[*Miss Gossage bounces in from upstairs. She is dressed for net ball in abbreviated gym dress, black stockings and a sash in the St. Swithin's colours.*]

GOSSAGE (*heartily*): Doesn't take *me* long to strip for games!

BILLINGS (*swallowing*): No—I can see that.

GOSSAGE: It must be very bracing here. I feel chock-a-block full of energy this afternoon.

BILLINGS: The sooner you pitch in and play it off the better.

GOSSAGE: Oh—I've really got oodles of time—

BILLINGS (*pained*): Oodles.

TASSELL (*rising*): Well—I've finished my little lot—

BILLINGS (*quickly*): No, no, don't go, old boy—
(*Indicating letters*) I mean—look at all these I've
got to stick up—

GOSSAGE (*eagerly*): I'll lick your envelopes for you.

BILLINGS: What?

TASSELL: Might as well face it now as later. No good
shutting your eyes to it. So long.

[*Tassell goes out to school. Billings looks after him in
horror.*]

GOSSAGE (*crosses to table and sits in the chair Tassell
has vacated*): Well—my tongue's hanging out.

BILLINGS (*turning, startled*): What? Oh—no—as a
matter of fact, thanks very much—now I come to
look at them, they're all done—(*He hurriedly scoops
up the letters.*)

GOSSAGE: What did Mr. Tassell mean—no good
shutting your eyes to it?

BILLINGS: Oh, well—er—when you're sticking
envelopes, if you shut your eyes—you might lick
the address off the front or something—I'd better
go and post these—(*He turns to go—but Miss Gos-
sage takes the letters out of his hand.*)

GOSSAGE: No hurry—I'll drop them in, on my way
—

BILLINGS (*defeated*): Thank you, Miss Gossage.

GOSSAGE (*warmly*): Call me Sausage.

BILLINGS: Sausage?

GOSSAGE: Gossage—Sausage. My nickname with
the girls. (*Flatteringly*) I don't ask everyone to use
it.

BILLINGS: Oh. Thank you very much.

GOSSAGE (*moving closer*): I expect you've got a nick-
name too—with the boys?

BILLINGS (*retreating*): Possibly.

GOSSAGE (*still advancing*): Now don't pretend you

don't know what it is. If you don't tell me, I shall only worm it out of one of them.

BILLINGS (*still retreating*): I shouldn't bother.

GOSSAGE: Oh, yes I shall. (*Cornering Billings, roguishly*) Come on now—what is it?

BILLINGS (*disgustedly*): If you must know—Daisy.

GOSSAGE: What an extraordinary nickname!

BILLINGS (*firmly*): And I don't ask anyone to use it.

GOSSAGE: Whatever made them call you Daisy?

BILLINGS: I was foolish enough in class one day to utter the words "Give me your answer do." (*Irritably*) Now, if you don't mind—

[*Billings makes to go, but Miss Gossage puts a restraining hand on his arm.*]

GOSSAGE (*reproachfully*): Daisy—temper—temper—

BILLINGS (*furious*): Don't call me Daisy—!

[*Miss Whitchurch and Pond enter at french windows.*]

WHITCHURCH (*triumphantly*): Caught! Red handed!

BILLINGS (*indignantly*): Nothing of the sort.

WHITCHURCH: The tin was still inside his tuck box—empty! (*She produces a tin of Golden Syrup.*)

BILLINGS (*relieved*): Oh—the tool-bag treacler.

GOSSAGE: I must be off to netters—

[*Gossage goes by french windows.*]

WHITCHURCH: As I predicted—a hooligan from Hilary Hall.

POND (*gloomily*): Hopcroft minor.

BILLINGS (*nodding*): I know—good lad. (*Hastily*) I mean—Good Lord—are you sure?

POND: There was a trail of treacle—straight to his cubby hole.

WHITCHURCH: And what's more—traces on his person.

BILLINGS (*thoughtfully*): H'm. That does make it a bit sticky.

POND (*taking him literally*): He's washing them off now.

WHITCHURCH: The whole affair was a deliberate onslaught upon St. Swithin's. I only hope an example will be made of it.

BILLINGS (*enthusiastically*): So do I.

POND (*nodding*): The boy fully deserves whatever reward—punishment we shall give him.

[*Hopcroft appears at double doors, knocks.*]

(*Genially*) Ah, come in, Hopcroft— (*pulling himself together, very severely*) Come in, boy.

[*Hopcroft enters.*]

First of all—your form master will have something to say.

BILLINGS: Hopcroft—I'm surprised at you, being found out like that—(*Hastily*) found out treacling tool-bags.

HOPCROFT: Yes, sir.

BILLINGS: You're old enough to know that that is *not* one of the uses of Golden Treacle.

HOPCROFT: Yes, sir.

BILLINGS: Glue would have been just as good—

WHITCHURCH (*interrupting with heat*) We've had enough beating about the bush. I want corporal punishment.

BILLINGS (*eyeing her hastily*): How right you are. Isn't she, headmaster?

POND: Quite (*to Hopcroft*) Hopcroft—it will be our painful duty to chastise you.

BILLINGS: More painful for us than for you, I've said that before, but I've never meant it before.

WHITCHURCH (*impatiently*): Well—is there any more to be said?

POND: Nothing. You can safely leave the rest to us.

WHITCHURCH: I hardly propose to carry out the sentence myself—

BILLINGS: Hardly.

[*Billings and Pond laugh.*]

WHITCHURCH (*cuts into their laughter*): But I intend to witness the execution of it.

BILLINGS (*taken aback*): Oh, I don't think she could do that, could she?

POND: It would be highly improper.

BILLINGS (*to Miss Whitchurch*): You'd be surprised how improper.

WHITCHURCH (*icily*): I fail to see why.

BILLINGS: A young boy's disclosures are not always for feminine eyes.

WHITCHURCH (*defeated*): Very well. I bow to your judgment. (*She moves to the doors, then pauses*) I merely say this—the boy must be punished most strongly on his deserts.

POND: On his where?

WHITCHURCH (*angrily*): What I mean is—do not spare the rod. And in future, kindly keep your eyes on your pupils.

BILLINGS (*to Pond*): You'll need to see an oculist for that.

[*Miss Whitchurch glares at him and goes out by double doors to school.*]

POND (*genially*): Well, Hopcroft, I don't want to be too severe—

[*Miss Whitchurch reappears.*]

WHITCHURCH: Six strokes at the very least.

POND: Only six? (*Nods and smiles, then to Hopcroft sternly*) As I was saying, Hopcroft, I *can't* be too severe—

[*Miss Whitchurch goes again.*]

(*In a friendly tone*) No—I can't be *too* severe—

BILLINGS: Seeing it's your first offence—

POND: For today, at all events—as a matter of fact, I don't think I could lay my hand on the cane at the moment. (*He turns away to discuss the matter with Billings*) What do you suggest, Billings?

BILLINGS: Fifty lines?

POND: Sounds rather a lot. We could keep him in, of course.

BILLINGS: On a fine afternoon like this?

POND: Well—just for a little while.

BILLINGS: Fifteen minutes.

POND: Ten, anyway.

BILLINGS: Right.

POND: That's settled then. (*Turning to Hopcroft, sternly*) Come here, boy. You realise Hopcroft, that having committed an offence of this kind, you must expect the very rigorous punishment it deserves?

HOPCROFT: Yes, sir.

POND: Very well, You will be kept in for five whole minutes.

HOPCROFT (*his face lighting up*): Thank you very much, sir.

POND: Thank you very much, Hopcroft.

[*He turns and goes with great dignity into the study. Hopcroft stands and looks out of the windows.*]

BILLINGS (*to Hopcroft*): Well—what are you waiting for?

HOPCROFT: I'm kept in for five minutes, sir.

BILLINGS: All right—you've been in five minutes, haven't you?

HOPCROFT (*puzzled*): Yes—I suppose I have, sir—

BILLINGS: Well—then—cut along and change.

HOPCROFT (*more puzzled*): Thanks very much, sir.

BILLINGS: Wait a minute, how's your pocket money going this week?

HOPCROFT: It's gone, sir.

BILLINGS: What—all of it?

HOPCROFT: Yes, sir.

BILLINGS: Here's five bob.

HOPCROFT (*astonished*): Thanks awfully, sir.

BILLINGS: And if you've—er—any more ideas of the same kind, don't get caught the next time.

HOPCROFT: No, sir.

[*Completely astonished, he turns and hurries out to school. Billings goes out at french windows and turns left—sees something and retires disgustedly in the opposite direction, disappearing outside to the right. Barbara enters from left with a bunch of flowers. She crosses to the flower vase and is about to put flowers in it when Tassell enters from the school by double doors. He looks at Barbara in some surprise.*]

BARBARA: Oh—I just brought these for Miss Harper—I hope it's all right—

TASSELL: I'll tell her.

BARBARA: Oh, no—they're anonymous—(*she turns to put them in vase.*)

TASSELL (*absently*): Looks more like larkspur to me—(*Realising*) Oh, I see what you—(*Suddenly*) I say, it isn't her birthday, is it?

BARBARA (*turning back again, still holding flowers*): Miss Harper's? Heavens, no—that's December 5th. (*Making mystic sign of Zodiac in the air*) Sagittarius with Saturn in the ascendant. Lucky colour, turquoise blue.

TASSELL: You seem to know a lot about her private life.

BARBARA (*seriously*): I've found out everything I can. (*Eagerly*) She's keen, isn't she?

TASSELL: Is she? What on?

BARBARA: Not on anything. Just keen. I think she's absolutely enormous.

TASSELL (*stiffly*): I don't agree at all. She's very slim.

BARBARA (*scornfully*): I don't mean like that. I mean she's toasted cheese—ripe fruit—wizard, if you want to be old fashioned.

TASSELL: Oh, I see what you mean—yes—

BARBARA: Well, you do agree, don't you?

TASSELL: Agree? I should say I do. I think Miss Harper's the most enormous thing I've ever seen in my life.

[*Joyce enters as he speaks. She is carrying a quantity of envelopes. She stares at what Tassell is saying.*]

(*Hastily*) Well—wizard if you want to be old-fashioned. Oh, hullo, Miss Harper.

JOYCE (*smiles at him. To Barbara*): What do you want, Barbara?

BARBARA (*gazing at her adoringly*): Me, Miss Harper? (*Drops flowers unobtrusively on the table*) Oh—I just wanted to—well—I wondered if you'd let me help you with the envelopes—

TASSELL (*indignantly*): Oh, now, look here—I was going to—I mean, bags I, or whatever you call it.

JOYCE (*smiling, to Barbara*): Oughtn't you to be out at games?

TASSELL: Yes, of course you ought—oughtn't you?

BARBARA (*to Joyce*): I'm not playing today. Miss Gossage gave me two hours garden weeding.

TASSELL: Well go on then, pop out and pull up.

BARBARA (*pleadingly*): Oh, I say, Miss Harper, can't I—?

JOYCE (*firmly*): No, Barbara.

BARBARA (*very meekly*): Yes, Miss Harper.

[*She gazes adoringly at Joyce, then turns and runs out by french windows.*]

JOYCE (*smiling*): She's just at the worshipping age. I expect you suffer from the same kind of thing—

TASSELL (*looking at her ardently*): Yes—I'm rather afraid I do. Only much worse.

JOYCE: They soon grow out of it.

TASSELL: I doubt very much if I shall. I mean—er—(*Seeing flowers*) Oh—these are for you—

JOYCE (*surprised and touched*): Me? Oh—that's very nice of you—

TASSELL: No, no—it isn't. They're larkspur—I mean they're anonymous.

JOYCE (*smelling flowers*): They're lovely—sort of turquoise blue.

TASSELL: Your lucky colour.

JOYCE (*surprised*): Is it? (*Starts to put flowers in vase.*)

TASSELL (*nodding*) Sagittarius the fifth, with December in the ascendant—(*attempts signs of Zodiac, but can't get them right*) I mean—(*Getting carried away*) Miss Harper, If you only knew how keen I think I am—you are—that is—well, when I look at you—I think of toasted fruit and ripe cheese—(*Emotionally*) Miss Harper—

JOYCE: Would you put these on the mantelpiece, please? (*He does so. Then turns eagerly to her again.*)

TASSELL: Oh, Miss Harper, I really must tell you—

JOYCE: I think we'd better do the letters.

TASSELL (*deflated*): Oh—yes—I suppose we had.

[*Joyce sits down at table and opens first letter. Tassell, before sitting, moves the other chair closer to her. Joyce looks up as he does so.*]

(*With an embarrassed smile*) It's rather a long table for two. You won't have so far to reach.

[*He sits, rather suddenly. Joyce smiles and goes on reading. Tassell studies Joyce's profile adoringly. Hastily, he affects an air of unconcern as she passes him first letter and envelope. She picks up the next letter. Tassel, gazing at her again, absently folds envelope in half and puts it inside the letter, folds letter and licks the edge. He looks at it in bewilderment—Joyce hands him next envelope and letter.*]

(*Putting them aside, in determined tone*) Miss Harper—

[*Pond enters precipitately from the study.*]

POND (*in great agitation*): Emergency! Emergency!

[*Tassell sits back despairingly.*]

Get everybody! There's no time to lose! (*He dashes to hall, picks up school bell and starts to ring it frantically.*)

[*Tassell and Joyce look at each other in bewilderment, then turn in their chairs. Pond, seeing them still sitting, comes back, still ringing the bell and shouts inaudibly at them.*] •

Don't sit there! Get everybody!

[*Tassell and Joyce both jump up, leaving the pile of letters on the table.*]

TASSELL (*equally inaudible*): What?

JOYCE (*likewise*): What's happened?

POND (*irritably and inaudibly*): I can't hear you!

TASSELL (*still inaudible*): What?

POND (*exasperatedly stops ringing. Agitatedly*): They'll be here in half an hour! Oh, fetch them in, can't you?

TASSELL: Who?

JOYCE: Who'll be here? What's happened?

POND (*exasperated*): Don't ask questions—there's no time!—*He is about to ring the bell again when—*

[*Miss Whitchurch hurries in from upstairs.*]

WHITCHURCH (*sharply*): What's the meaning of this? Was that a boy's bell or a girl's bell?

POND: Neither—it's an alarm bell!

[*Billings is hurrying in at french windows.*]

BILLINGS (*to Tassell*): Are we on fire now?

[*Tassell shakes his head in confusion. Hopcroft runs in half-changed, from school—a cricket shirt hanging out of his white flannels.*]

HOPCROFT (*excitedly*): I say, what's up? (*As he sees gathering of staff*) Oh, sorry, sir—(*He turns to withdraw.*)

POND: No, Hopcroft—don't go. This emergency affects the entire school. *Both* entire schools.

WHITCHURCH: What emergency? Has this boy been at it again?

POND: No, No. Parents. Mr. and Mrs. Sowter. They've just telephoned me!

TASSELL (*aghast*): They haven't found out?

POND: Not yet. But it's only a matter of time. They're coming down here. To-day. This afternoon.

BILLINGS: But didn't you tell 'em no to—invent something?

POND: How could I? They're at the station. They're only waiting for a taxi. Oh, dang it, what can we do?

TASSELL: Sowter? Aren't they the ones who don't want any feminine influence?

POND: Yes, yes—that only doubles the trouble. We must do something—what, I can't imagine—

HOPCROFT (*eagerly*): I know, sir—tell them we've all got scarlet fever!

WHITCHURCH: Since they telephoned? Don't be ridiculous.

JOYCE: You could say it had just broken out.

TASSELL: That's it—and then lock the main gates to prevent them breaking in!

POND (*with growing hope*): Lock the main gates—it's a possibility—

BILLINGS (*bluntly*): It isn't. If they even reach the main gates, what will they see through them? St. Swithin's net balling all over the playing field.

POND (*deflated*): So they will. No good.

BILLINGS: There's only one thing to do. Eliminate St. Swithin's.

WHITCHURCH (*outraged*): Do what?

BILLINGS: Remove St. Swithin's from the scene. Conceal the entire school while the Sowters are on the premises.

TASSELL: You mean, make them think we are still only Hilary Hall here? By Jove, I believe R.B.'s right!

POND (*seriously*): Fifty girls and three mistresses. We haven't enough cupboards to shut them up in.

WHITCHURCH (*furiously*): I refuse to be shut up! I never heard of such a thing!

POND: Come, come, Miss Whitchurch—you yourself spoke of co-operation—

WHITCHURCH: Co-operation. Not incarceration.

TASSELL: It would only be for a couple of hours, at the most—

WHITCHURCH (*outraged*): A couple of hours—in a cupboard—

BILLINGS: There's no question of cupboards. What's the position. The girls are playing net ball—the boys are down at the baths. Right. All we have to do is to switch them over.

JOYCE: You mean send the girls down to the baths?

BILLINGS (*nodding*): And bring the boys up to the playing field. (*To Joyce and Miss Whitchurch*) You two and Miss Gossage keep out of the way and there you are.

POND (*fervently*): Oh, I hope so.

WHITCHURCH (*dubiously*): I'm not at all sure I like the idea.

BILLINGS: Nobody likes it. It's a matter of necessity.

POND: After all, Hilary Hall would do the same for you. (*To Billings and Tassell*) Wouldn't we?

BILLINGS: Obviously.

TASSELL: Of course we would.

[*They look expectantly at Miss Whitchurch.*]

WHITCHURCH: Oh, very well, then—under protest—yes.

POND: Oh, thank you, Miss Whitchurch. I can't tell you what this means—

BILLINGS: You can't now—we've got to get a move on.

POND: Yes, yes. Hopcroft—you go down to the baths, tell the boys to dry and dress with all speed and report to the pavilion instanter.

HOPCROFT: Yes, sir.

[*Hopcroft runs out by the french windows.*]

POND: Tassell!

TASSELL: Sir?

POND: You'll take the cricket, of course, when they get here.

[*Tassell nods.*]

Miss Harper, perhaps you'd—

WHITCHURCH (*with umbrage*): Miss Harper is on *my* staff. She takes her instructions from me.

POND: Then kindly give them.

WHITCHURCH: Miss Harper—

POND: Get your girls off the playing field and down to the baths.

WHITCHURCH: Miss Harper—

BILLINGS: Yes, and undressed and under water instanter.

WHITCHURCH: Miss Harper—

TASSELL: Instanter.

WHITCHURCH (*glaring*): Tell Miss Gossage—

JOYCE: All right—I know what.

[*Joyce runs out by french windows. Pond, Billings and Tassell are laughing.*]

WHITCHURCH (*scathingly*): The laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorns under a pot.

[*During this Rainbow enters by front door, looks for bell on hall table and finding it missing, enters Common Room.*]

RAINBOW (*as he enters*): Beg pardon, sir—

POND (*irritatedly*): What is it, Rainbow?

RAINBOW: I heard the bell go.

POND (*alarmed*): The bell! Not the Sowters!

TASSELL: Can't be.

RAINBOW: I was in the grounds. I heard it go. But when I come—it's gone.

POND (*agitated*): Come—gone—what are you talking about?

WHITCHURCH: That man talks in riddles. I can never solve him. Rainbow, if the front door went—

BILLINGS (*suddenly realising*): He doesn't mean that one. (*Nods towards front door*) —he means *that* one. (*Indicates bell Pond is holding.*)

POND: Oh, this one. (*Handing bell to Rainbow*) That was me.

RAINBOW (*giving him a look*): Beg your pardon, sir— (*He turns to go.*)

TASSELL (*thinking of something—urgently*): Wait a minute—Rainbow. The playing field—it's fixed up for net-ball, I suppose?

RAINBOW (*bitterly*): It is. And the game I had with them contraptions—

WHITCHURCH (*severely*): They're not contraptions—they're goals.

RAINBOW (*unbelievably*): Goals? Ten foot up in the air, with busted butterfly nets hanging off of them!

POND (*exasperatedly*): Oh, never mind the butterflies—change it over immediately—cricket is going to be played.

RAINBOW: Cricket? But it's their turn. (*Nods at Miss Whitchurch.*)

BILLINGS (*impatiently*): They're missing a turn.

WHITCHURCH: Oh, no, we're not. We'll make it up later.

TASSELL (*urgently*): Net-ball's off—cricket's on—straight away, Rainbow, now!

RAINBOW (*aghast*): Now? But I've just put in them contraptions!

POND (*desperately*): Don't argue, Rainbow—rectify.
RAINBOW: Yes, sir. (*As he goes*) I always said it wasn't feasible—

[*Rainbow goes out, muttering, to grounds.*]

TASSELL: I must get changed.

[*Tassell hurries out by double doors and upstairs.*]

POND: Billings—you'd better go through the school looking for girls—

WHITCHURCH: I will do that, thank you. If there *are* any odd girls—

BILLINGS: Plenty.

WHITCHURCH (*glaring*): They will be out of the way before many minutes are passed.

POND: And before any Sowters are present.

WHITCHURCH: Yes.

[*She gives Pond a look, and goes out to school.*]

POND: I must go and change myself.

BILLINGS (*puzzled*): You're not going to play cricket too?

POND: No, no—into my academics—the Sowters are the sort to expect it. You keep an eye on the drive—

BILLINGS: They won't be here yet, will they?

POND: I hope not. Still, it's best to be on the safe side.

[*Pond goes off upstairs. Billings shrugs his shoulders and goes out through the front door, disappearing to the right.*]

[*A moment later Mrs. Peck appears from left, outside the french windows—and peers rather nervously in. She is a small, slightly old-fashioned woman of about fifty. She calls back in the direction from which she has come.*]

MRS. PECK: Edward—

[*The Reverend Edward Peck comes from the same direction. He is an earnest man in light clerical grey. About the same age as his wife.*]

This looks like the staff side, dear. I'm afraid we've come in the back way.

MR. PECK (*looking around*): Dear me—so we must have. Never mind— (*Entering by french windows*) I'm sure Miss Whitchurch will forgive us. (*Looking round*) They seem to have found quite pleasant quarters.

MRS. PECK (*who has followed him in*): They do. I was afraid as Julia hadn't said very much in her letters—

MR. PECK: Yes, yes—I'd better try and find someone— (*He is starting towards double doors, when Barbara comes past french windows*) Ah. (*Calling*) Excuse me— (*Barbara comes up to window*) I—ah—I don't know your name, I'm afraid—

BARBARA (*coming in*): Barbara Cahoun. *Not* spelt Colquhoun. You're Mr. and Mrs. Peck, aren't you?

MRS. PECK (*nodding*): Julia's parents. How clever of you.

MR. PECK: We were looking for Miss Whitchurch. You see, we suddenly decided to come down—

BARBARA (*staring*): Do you mean she didn't know you were coming?

MRS. PECK: No. It's quite a surprise visit.

BARBARA: Gosh! It certainly will be! I say, what a piece of gruesome!

MRS. PECK: A piece of what, dear?

BARBARA: I mean a smack in the eye. I'd better find her right away! (*She hurries to study door, knocks and looks in*) Not in there, won't be a sec.—

[*Barbara dashes across and goes out to school. The Pecks look at one another, bewildered.*]

MRS. PECK (*a little sadly*): Why should we be a smack in the eye?

MR. PECK: I don't know, dear. Or a bit of gruesome.

[*Tassell, now in cricket things, enters down the stairs. He is a little startled at seeing the Pecks, but quickly puts on a winning smile.*]

TASSELL: Oh—good afternoon. You managed to get here very quickly—

MRS. PECK: Well—I should hardly say that—

TASSELL (*smiling*): Excuse me, won't you—they're waiting for me to start the game— (*He goes to the corner behind the double doors, starts to get out cricket pads, boots, etc.*)

[*Mr. and Mrs. Peck stare—look at one another puzzled—then back at Tassell.*]

(*Extra heartily*) I expect you'll be out later to watch the cricket. We've got a pretty good team this term. I've been putting them through it thoroughly down at the nets.

MRS. PECK (*a little taken aback*): Putting them through it?

TASSELL: Rather. You needn't worry about mollycoddling here, I assure you. Cold bath every morning—a good stiff run twice a week—boxing, fencing . . . I'm a great believer in knocking the nonsense out of them right from the very beginning.

MRS. PECK: So it seems.

MR. PECK: You—er—you're on the staff here?

TASSELL: Oh yes, rather.

MRS. PECK: Couldn't they get anyone else:

TASSELL (*taken aback*): I beg your pardon?

MRS. PECK: A mistress, I mean. To do your work?

TASSELL (*indignantly*): They didn't want a mistress.

MRS. PECK: How very strange. (*To Mr. Peck*) Isn't it, dear?

MR. PECK (*nodding*): This is quite an innovation. (*To Tassell*) Miss Gossage has gone, I take it?

TASSELL (*bewildered*): Miss Gossage—

MRS. PECK: I don't understand Miss Whitchurch making no attempt to get a mistress.

MR. PECK (*nodding*): She's always been so much against turning the girls into tomboys.

TASSELL: Turning the—I say, you are Mr. and Mrs. Sowter, aren't you?

MR. PECK: No, no—our name's Peck.

TASSELL (*staring at him*): Peck—I thought there was something funny when I saw you were a—I mean—

MR. PECK: Something [•]funny?

MRS. PECK (*apologetically*): I suppose we should have warned Miss Whitchurch. We're Julia's parents.

TASSELL (*playing up*): Oh, Julia's parents. Of course, how silly of me. Dear little Julia Peck.

MRS. PECK (*with pride*): Well—she's five feet four, you know.

TASSELL: Oh, I know—yes. Dear, large little Julia Peck!

[*Billings enters through front door. He only sees Tassell at first.*]

BILLINGS: No sign of those blasted parents yet. (*He suddenly sees the Pecks—reacts violently. Hurriedly manages a polite smile*) Oh, how d'you do? My name's Billings—I'm . . .

TASSELL (*intervening*): The school doctor.

BILLINGS (*startled*): What?

TASSELL (*to Billings*): Mr. and Mrs. Peck—parents of Julia Peck. One of the biggest girls in St. Swithin's.

BILLINGS: St. . . . Oh.

TASSELL (*to Pecks*): Dr. Billings is new this ^{term} too, of course.

MR. PECK: What happened to Dr. Gunn?

TASSELL: Gunn? Oh, went off very suddenly.

MRS. PECK (*to Billings*): I'm very pleased to meet

you, Doctor. I don't need to tell you that Julia is rather a delicate girl—

BILLINGS (*bitterly*): She would be. At her age, I mean.

MRS. PECK: Her stamina is so small.

BILLINGS: I've noticed that. Curious when the rest of her is so large.

MRS. PECK: She seems to have very little resistance.

BILLINGS (*sympathetically*): Well, of course, there are a lot of girls like that.

MRS. PECK: She cycled too much last term and in the end she got run down.

BILLINGS: In which end? I mean—did she? Run down? Very unpleasant. Who by?

MRS. PECK (*puzzled*): By herself, I suppose.

BILLINGS: Sounds a funny sort of accident. Ah, well, never mind, she won't be doing any bicycling for a while.

MRS. PECK: Ah, you've seen to that.

BILLINGS: No—but someone else has.

MRS. PECK (*anxiously*): I hope, Doctor, you haven't allowed *her* to take part in any of these rough games.

BILLINGS: Rough games? At St. Swithin's? You can't know Miss Whitchurch. She won't even allow the girls to . . .

[*Tassell is shaking his head violently. Billings breaks off and stares. The Pecks catch him at it.*]

TASSELL (*apologetically*): It's a sort of nervous twitch I've got, doctor—I'd like a word with you about it.

MR. PECK (*concerned*): It doesn't seem a very healthy neighbourhood.

BILLINGS: Far from healthy. In fact, I don't advise you to stay a moment longer than you need.

MRS. PECK (*worried*): Really? Then it doesn't seem very wise to have moved the school here.

[*Miss Whitchurch enters anxiously from school.*]

WHITCHURCH (*as she does so—aghast as she sees the group*): Oh, I'm too late.

BILLINGS: Too late to introduce us, yes.

TASSELL: We've done it for ourselves.

MR. PECK: It was something of a surprise, Miss Whitchurch, but I suppose what must be must be.

WHITCHURCH: I'm glad you can take it that way, very glad indeed. Of course, I'm taking steps to part company with the boys at the earliest possible moment.

MRS. PECK: The boys?

TASSELL (*hurriedly laughing it off*): Miss Whitchurch calls us that for short.

[*He turns gaily to Miss Whitchurch, but is frozen by her expression.*]

I was going to explain to Mr. and Mrs. Peck that my position as games master is purely temporary.

BILLINGS: *And mine—filling the—er—breach left by Dr. Gunn.*

WHITCHURCH: Oh. Quite.

MRS. PECK (*to Miss Whitchurch*): We were a little worried about Julia—that's why we came down so early in the term.

WHITCHURCH: Worried?

MR. PECK: Her letters, Miss Whitchurch. They didn't seem as frank as usual.

WHITCHURCH: Strange. Of course I don't know how frank they used to be. (*She sees pile of letters on table and hurriedly slides needlework over them.*)

MRS. PECK: We thought she might be hiding something from us.

WHITCHURCH: Oh, I hardly think that. After all, what could there be to hide?

[*Pond enters from upstairs. He is in his best suit and wing collar, wearing cap and gown and full academic honours. He enters with an expansive smile.*]

POND: Ah—good afternoon . . . (*He pulls up abruptly, the smile freezing on his face.*)

MR. PECK: Good heavens!

[*Billings coming to the rescue, laughs heartily and applauds.*]

BILLINGS: Very good indeed. A first class impersonation, isn't it, Tassell? (*He frowns at Tassell to applaud, too, which he does, though mystified.*) (*To the Pecks*) Mr. Pond's playing the star part in the end of term theatricals—"Eric—or Little By Little."

TASSELL: He's had to start rehearsing already—very slow at learning his lines.

MR. PECK: Mr. Pond? I don't think we've met . . . ?

BILLINGS (*before Pond can speak*): Ah, I don't suppose so. You see, they were married in the holidays.

MRS. PECK: Married? Who?

BILLINGS: Mr. Pond and Miss Whitchurch.

TASSELL: That's only her trade name now. (*To Miss Whitchurch*) Isn't it, Mrs. Pond?

WHITCHURCH (*gulping*): Well—er—yes.

MR. PECK: This is a surprise.

POND: I should say so—suppose so.

MRS. PECK: Congratulations!

MR. PECK: Yes, indeed.

[*As they speak Mr. Pond looks helplessly at Miss Whitchurch.*]

POND (*in an undertone*): Who the dickens . . . ?

WHITCHURCH (*forcefully; also in undertone*): My parents.

POND (*surprised*): Yours? Oh, really? Well, this is a pleasure. (*Shaking hands with Mr. Peck*) How d'you do, sir. (*Turning to Mrs. Peck*) And—er—(*shyly*) may I call you Mother?

[*He kisses her on the cheek. Mrs. Peck is amazed—Mr. Peck stares, outraged. So do the others.*]

(*Continuing happily*) You mustn't feel you've lost your daughter—but rather gained a son.

MRS. PECK (*aghast*): Lost our daughter?

POND: Perhaps one day we shall bring you *back* the patter of little feet.

MR. PECK: What!

BILLINGS (*hurriedly*): It's quite all right, sir. (*To Mrs. Peck*) Nothing to worry about, Mrs. Peck. Mr. Pond took you for his wife's mother.

MRS. PECK: Well, really. I know I'm not so young as I was, but I'm hardly old enough to be—

WHITCHURCH (*icily*): Hardly old enough to be what, Mrs. Peck?

[*Before the storm can break, Hopcroft enters through french windows, rather breathless.*]

HOPCROFT (*to Pond*): I've told them, sir, they're all on their way up.

WHITCHURCH (*aghast*): *What!*

HOPCROFT (*to Pond*): They thought I was ragging at first, but I told them—

POND (*hurriedly*): That'll do, that'll do. Be off with you.

[*Pond bundles Hopcroft out towards school by double doors.*]

MRS. PECK (*a little bewildered by the speed of the event*): Who was that?

POND (*without thinking*): One of my boys. (*Hastily.*) One of our boys. (*Indicates Miss Whitchurch*) Er—the eldest of course.

MR. PECK: But I thought you were only married in the holidays.

TASSELL: He may be slow at some things, but he's very quick at others.

BILLINGS: The holidays fifteen years ago, it was—in Australia.

MRS. PECK: Australia?

BILLINGS (*blandly*): Yes—that accounts for your not having run into the family before.

TASSELL: They've only just come up over from down under.

[*Sound of Boys' voices comes from the grounds.*]

MR. PECK (*looks in the direction of french windows. Staring*): Gracious me—a lot more boys.

[*He starts towards the windows to get a closer look, but Billings and Tassell interpose themselves.*]

BILLINGS (*as they do*): It's a 'very large family.

TASSELL: Fifteen years, you know, and several sets of twins.

[*They effectively prevent Mr. Peck from being able to see out.*]

WHITCHURCH (*quickly*): Well, I mustn't keep you standing here. If you'd care to come into my study, Mr. Peck—(*Frigidly to Mrs Peck*) And Mrs. Peck, of course.

MRS. PECK (*mildly*): We'd like to see Julia as soor as possible . . .

WHITCHURCH (*firmly*): Quite. But this is a little too soon. She's down at the baths—up in the bath-room—er—having a bath.

MR. PECK (*surprised*): After luncheon?

BILLINGS (*quickly*): I prescribed it—three times a day after meals.

MRS. PECK: That would be for her pores, I expect.

BILLINGS (*blandly*): Oh, no—not just her paws—all over.

MR. PECK (*a little bewildered*): Perhaps we could wander round the grounds?

POND (*hastily, shaking his head*): No, no—for the present—out of bounds.

WHITCHURCH: The girls are playing hare and hounds.

[*Miss Whitchurch opens the study door and the Pecks are hustled through, Miss Whitchurch following.*]

POND (*agitatedly*): Here's a nice how d'you I shall need the study myself in a few minutes the Sowters.

TASSELL (*looking towards study, in sudden alarm*): Supposing they see things—Hilary Hall reports and what not?

POND (*definitely*): He's a parson—he wouldn't look. (*Dubiously*) Would he?

BILLINGS: Well, I knew a bishop once, who . . .

[*The study door opens and Miss Whitchurch enters hurriedly, closing it behind her. She is surprised to see the others standing there.*]

WHITCHURCH: Haven't you organised it?

POND: Organised what?

WHITCHURCH: The change over, of course. Boys back to baths—girls to playing fields. I'll see to it. (*She starts towards french windows.*)

POND (*agitatedly*): Here—no—stop—I say, you can't do that—you mustn't . . .

WHITCHURCH (*forcefully*): I can, I must and I will.

POND: But the Sowters—they'll be here any minute!

WHITCHURCH: They aren't here now. The Pecks are. First come, first served.

BILLINGS (*forcefully*): Yes, but people in glass houses—

WHITCHURCH: What has that to do with it?

BILLINGS (*defeated*): I don't know.

WHITCHURCH: Nincompoop! (*To Pond*) You can meet your Sowters down the road—tell them the drive's up and divert them through the tradesmen's entrance—then put them in the servants' hall.

POND (*horried*): Sowters in the servants' hall!

WHITCHURCH: Tell them it's the temporary waiting

room. And when you've done so, all of you and the boys will go to the baths, sending the girls up here.

POND: *All go?*

TASSELL and BILLINGS: What, us?

WHITCHURCH: I'm risking no further imbroglios such as we've had already.

BILLINGS (*dryly*): So we have to leave the Sowters in the servants' hall without even a guard on the door to see they stay inside?

WHITCHURCH: Lock them in and tell them later the door jammed.

POND: But that's ridiculous.

WHITCHURCH: Those are my terms. It's either that or exposure.

TASSELL: Then we'll make it double exposure.

POND (*in agitation*): Oh—what is all this—it's no time to talk photography—

WHITCHURCH: Will you do it or won't you?

POND (*helplessly to the other two*): Will we or won't we?

TASSELL: We'll have to.

BILLINGS (*to Miss Whitchurch*): But only if you pack those Pecks off as fast as you can.

WHITCHURCH (*with umbrage*): I shall naturally do my utmost . . .

[*Rainbow passes the french windows. At the same moment Barbara appears in the hall from school. Tassell sees Rainbow, and Miss Whitchurch sees Barbara, almost simultaneously.*]

TASSELL: Rainbow!

WHITCHURCH: Barbara!

[*Tassell and Miss Whitchurch glare at each other, having spoken almost simultaneously. Rainbow enters at french windows, Barbara at double doors.*]

WHITCHURCH: Barbara—

TASSELL: Rainbow—

[*Tassell and Miss Whitchurch glare at each other again.*]

BILLINGS (*intervening blandly*): Shall we try it one at a time? (*He gestures towards Miss Whitchurch.*)

WHITCHURCH: Barbara . . .

BARBARA: Yes, Miss Whitchurch.

WHITCHURCH: Find Miss Harper and ask her to come up here at once. Tell her Mr. and Mrs. Peck are here.

BARBARA: Yes, Miss Whitchurch.

[*Barbara runs out by the french windows.*]

[*Miss Whitchurch nods frigidly to Tassell. Rainbow is waiting with a long-suffering expression.*]

TASSELL (*to Rainbow*): It's about the playing field—

RAINBOW: It's all ready for you. Them contraptions. They're harder to take out than what they are to put in.

TASSELL: That's a good thing. You've got to put them in again.

RAINBOW: I've got to what?

TASSELL: Change it all back again to net-ball—quick as you can. The boys are going back to the baths.

RAINBOW: But you said cricket was going to be—
POND: Don't argue!

[*Mr. Peck appears from the study.*]

MR. PECK: Excuse me—

POND (*fiercely*): Shut up! (*Seeing who it is*) Oh! I beg your pardon.

MR. PECK (*smiling nervously*): Er—my wife was wondering—

WHITCHURCH (*firmly*): I'm afraid *not*, Mr. Peck. Not *yet*. I'd like you to look through the summer science syllabus—

[*Miss Whitchurch hustles Mr. Peck back to the study, following him in and closing the door.*]

POND: Well, don't stand there, Rainbow—this is urgent.

RAINBOW (*rebelliously*): The opposite was—ten minutes ago. I might just as well wait another ten minutes and—

POND (*outraged*): Rainbow!

RAINBOW (*resignedly*): Very good, sir. (*With an awful look, he turns to go—then pauses*) I'm going to put my tea kettle on first.

[*Daring them by his look to disagree, Rainbow goes out to school.*]

POND: That man's becoming mutinous.

BILLINGS: Never mind Rainbow—we'd better see about the Sowters.

TASELL: We can't lock them in—

BILLINGS: Of course not. (*To Pond*) You'll have to ask them to wait and hope to goodness they'll wait long enough.

POND: But suppose they don't—they might wander round the grounds—

TASELL: With net-ball in full swing.

BILLINGS: I've been thinking about that. We can't risk St. Swithin's coming up at all. We'll tell that Sausage woman she's to take the girls for a walk.

TASELL: A nice long walk.

BILLINGS: They can go out at the bottom gate, by the baths. Phew! I shan't mind a cold plunge.

POND: Hear, hear!

TASELL (*suddenly*): Ssh! Listen—

BILLINGS: What?

TASELL: I believe I can hear a car!

POND and BILLINGS (*aghast*): What!

TASELL: Sh! Listen.

BILLINGS: Oh heavens!

POND: The Sowters!

[*All three run out by double doors and off up the drive.*]

[*Rainbow appears from school and comes in.*]

RAINBOW (*as he enters*): I just thought of another thing . . . (*He breaks off as he finds the room empty, shrugs resignedly and is starting towards french windows, when Hopcroft comes downstairs, and seeing Rainbow, enters.*]

HOPCROFT (*in an undertone*): Hi—Rainbow!

RAINBOW (*turns, despairingly*): If you got another message from the Head—

HOPCROFT: I haven't. (*Coming up close and speaking conspiratorily*) How'd you like to earn half a crown?

RAINBOW (*suspiciously*): I'd have to see it first.

[*Hopcroft shows him half-a-crown.*]

What would I have to do?

HOPCROFT: Go down to the baths and pinch all their clothes.

RAINBOW: And play fast and loose with my bread-and-butter? No, thank you.

HOPCROFT (*exasperatedly*): Oh, hang! And now was just the time to finish them off for good and all.

RAINBOW: Finish who?

HOPCROFT: St. Swithin's, of course.

RAINBOW (*his face lighting up*): St. Swithin's? Why didn't you say so before?

HOPCROFT (*eagerly*): You'll do it then?

RAINBOW (*thoughtfully*): Yes, but wait a minute—it don't make sense to me—going down and pinching . . . how's that going to finish off St. Swithin's?

HOPCROFT (*impatiently*): It's obvious how.

RAINBOW (*perplexed*): Is it?

HOPCROFT: Of course it is. But there's no time to stand here gassing. Will you do it or won't you?

RAINBOW (*grimly*): I'll try anything once.

HOPCROFT: Good egg! I'll pay you afterwards. (*He turns to go.*)

RAINBOW (*thinking of something*): Here—wait a minute—I never known your sort go flinging half-

crowns away—what's the idea of getting me to do it?

HOPCROFT (*with an air of innocence*): Well, if you do it, I can't get caught, can I?

RAINBOW: No, I suppose—what! Now, listen—

HOPCROFT (*hearing something in study*): Look out—scram!

[*Hopcroft darts out towards school.*]

[*Rainbow, slower in the uptake, is moving to french windows, when the study door opens and Miss Whitchurch comes out, followed by the Pecks.*]

WHITCHURCH (*as she enters*): I daresay, now, that the girls . . . (*She is dismayed to see Rainbow. Severely*) Rainbow—haven't you done yet, that which you have to do?

RAINBOW (*defensively*): I was only told five minutes ago—

WHITCHURCH (*hastily*): I know what you were told. I want to see results.

RAINBOW (*looking straight at her*): Don't worry, mum, you're going to.

[*Rainbow goes out by french windows.*]

MR. PECK (*to Miss Whitchurch*): You were saying, Miss Whitchurch, about the girls . . . ?

WHITCHURCH: I was saying I daresay now that the girls are—er—well on their way home. They've been out for a nature study ramble.

MR. PECK (*puzzled*): I thought you said they were playing Hare and Hounds.

WHITCHURCH (*stiffly*): Nature study embraces flora and fauna.

MRS. PECK: And what about Julia?

WHITCHURCH: I beg your pardon?

MRS. PECK (*plaintively*): Won't she be out of her bath by now?

WHITCHURCH (*brazenly*): Bath? Julia's out with the other girls.

MR. PECK: But I thought you said she was having a bath. It did seem rather peculiar, for Julia.

WHITCHURCH: At this time of day? (*With a forced laugh*) Now, I'm afraid someone else is rambling, Mr. Peck. (*Briskly*) Come along, I'll show you the classroom accommodation . . . Come along, Mr. Peck, Mrs. Peck.

MRS. PECK: Perhaps we could have a little peep at Julia's woodwork.

WHITCHURCH: Her what?

MRS. PECK: In the carpenter's shop. She wrote that she'd been doing the most interesting things with a chisel.

WHITCHURCH (*grimly*): Yes, I've put a stop to that.

MR. PECK (*surprised*): Put a stop to it?

WHITCHURCH (*hastily*): Er, yes, she's done quite enough chiselling for one term.

[*Miss Whitchurch leads the way out by double doors. The Pecks go meekly, exchanging bewildered glances.*]

[*Mr. Sowter comes aggressively past french windows from left, followed by Mrs. Sowter. Sowter is a short, pugnacious, self-important man of middle age. Mrs. Sowter is tall, stately and severe.*]

MR. SOWTER (*pausing outside window and calling in annoyed tone*): Pond!

[*Looking around he sees the room and comes in. Mrs. Sowter follows him in.*]

(*Entering*) Pond! What the devil's happened to the feller? Does he think we're going to wait all afternoon?

MRS. SOWTER: Ridiculous.

MR. SOWTER: That's putting it mildly. If this is a sample of the school's efficiency we're wasting

Cyril's time and our money. Rudeness and procrastination, that's about all the boy's likely to learn here. He might just as well be at home—

MRS. SOWTER: Edgar!

MR. SOWTER (*impatiently*): You know well enough what I mean. (*Looking round*) Common room, I suppose. Flowers—cushions—don't like the look of it. (*He crosses to the study door.*)

MRS. SOWTER (*also looking round*): Effeminate.

MR. SOWTER (*opening study door and calling in*): Pond!

[*Mrs. Sowter sees needlework on table, picks up pyjamas and eyes them with asperity.*]

(*Turning*) Not there. (*He sees pyjamas*) Great Scott! What in the name of thunder—

MRS. SOWTER: Pyjamas.

MR. SOWTER: I know that. But look at them—damn it—they've got frills. What's a thing like that doing in a school like this?

MRS. SOWTER (*dropping them back on table*): Inexplicable!

MR. SOWTER: We'll see about that. (*Goes to french windows and calls*) Pond! (*Goes to double doors and calls*) Pond! (*Returning*) Ask me, we've been led up the garden—sending the boy here. Worse than the other place. Not a soul about. Fine afternoon—not even a game being played.

MRS. SOWTER: Incomprehensible.

MR. SOWTER: Certainly is. As for that so-called waiting room—confounded impertinence!

MRS. SOWTER: What?

MR. SOWTER: Didn't you see it? Notice on the wall—"In front of the children, kindly moderate your language." Of all the bl . . .

MRS. SOWTER (*sharply*): Edgar.

[*Joyce enters at french windows.*]

JOYCE (*confidently*): Good afternoon.

[*Mr. and Mrs. Sowter turn and stare at her in surprise.*]

(*With a smile*) I don't think we've met before. I only joined the staff last term.

MR. SOWTER (*horrified*): The staff! (*To Mrs. Sowter*) What did I tell you? Led up the garden.

MRS. SOWTER (*reflectively*): Matron?

MR. SOWTER: Matron? She doesn't look like one. (*To Joyce*) Are you?

JOYCE: No, I'm one of the mistresses.

MR. SOWTER (*aghast*): One of them. (*To Mrs. Sowter*) D'you hear that! (*Holding up pyjamas accusingly, to Joyce*) These are yours, I suppose?

JOYCE (*looking at him curiously*): That's the Lower Third's fancy needlework. Quite good, isn't it, for juniors?

MR. SOWTER (*beside himself*): Fancy needlework! You mean they make these darn things?

JOYCE: All sorts of things—tea-cosies—night-gowns . . .

MR. SOWTER (*choking*): Nightgowns! (*To Mrs. Sowter*) You see where your choice has landed us? Nightgowns! (*To Joyce*) Our boy's in the Lower Third—if he is still a boy . . . !

JOYCE (*dismayed*): You aren't Mr. and Mrs. Peck?

MR. SOWTER (*aggressively*): Peck? Why should we be?

MRS. SOWTER (*frigidly*): Sowter.

MR. SOWTER (*grimly, to Joyce*): And the sooner I see Pond the better. He gave us his solemn promise—in writing—that he and his staff were bachelors and he wouldn't have a mistress in the place.

JOYCE: Well—you see—I'm not really a mistress—I'm—I'm actually his niece. I'm helping out during the staff shortage.

MR. SOWTER (*sceptically*): And the others are all relations, too, I suppose?

JOYCE: Yes—that's right.

MR. SOWTER (*totally unconvinced*): I see. Well, you'd better fetch your—uncle.

JOYCE: I think I had. Would you mind waiting in the study?

MR. SOWTER (*rudely*): Yes. I would. We've had enough of waiting rooms—

MRS. SOWTER: Edgar—

MR. SOWTER (*resignedly*): Oh, very well—

[*The Sowters go into the study. Joyce closes the door on them. As she turns away, Miss Whitchurch enters agitatedly from school.*]

JOYCE (*urgently*): Where's Mr. Pond?

WHITCHURCH: Never mind that. Where are Miss Gossage and the girls?

JOYCE: You sent them down to the baths.

WHITCHURCH (*impatiently*): That's been countermanded long ago. Didn't Barbara tell you? The Pecks are here!

JOYCE (*nodding*): So are the Sowters. (*Indicating study*) They're in there.

WHITCHURCH (*horrified*): What!

JOYCE: They want Mr. Pond.

WHITCHURCH: Well, they can't have him. I've got the Pecks in the library and if they don't see Julia soon, I don't know what might happen. Go down to the baths and hurry them . . . no, you'd better stay here and keep an eye on the study. (*Perplexed*) I daren't leave the Pecks—

[*Hopcroft appears from the direction of the school, making for the front door.*]

(*Hurriedly*) Er—boy—Hopcroft—or whatever your name is.

[*Hopcroft pauses.*]

Come in here.

HOPCROFT (*enters—a look of disarming innocence on his face*): I don't know anything about it, Miss Whitchurch.

WHITCHURCH: About what? (*Before he can answer*) Never mind—go down to the baths and tell Miss Gossage and the girls to hurry up to the playing field.

HOPCROFT (*swallowing*): I can't do that, Miss Whitchurch.

WHITCHURCH: *Can't?* I'm telling you to.

HOPCROFT: I mean—*they* can't.

WHITCHURCH: Oh, and why not?

HOPCROFT: They haven't got any clothes.

WHITCHURCH: No clothes?

JOYCE: What d'you mean?

HOPCROFT: They've been pinch—taken away.

WHITCHURCH (*in an awful voice*): Hopcroft . . .

HOPCROFT: I didn't do it—I can swear to that.

WHITCHURCH (*ominously*): Someone's going to pay for this.

HOPCROFT (*involuntarily*): Half-a-crown.

WHITCHURCH (*sharply*): What?

HOPCROFT (*hastily*): Nothing, Miss Whitchurch.

JOYCE (*to Miss Whitchurch*): I'd better get some things and he can take them down.

WHITCHURCH: Do.

[*Joyce and Hopcroft start for double doors.*]

(*Thinking of something*) No. Wait. He can't go into the baths.

JOYCE: They're not locked in, are they?

WHITCHURCH: It's not locks I'm thinking of—they've got no clothes on. He'll have to throw the things over the wall—

JOYCE: With a note, saying "Put them on and come up here at once . . ."

WHITCHURCH: You get the clothes while I write the note—

[*All three hurry to doors.*]

JOYCE (*as they go*): Better mark it urgent—

WHITCHURCH: Come along, Hopcroft. No time to lose. Best foot foremost.

[*All three hurry out at double doors and upstairs.*]

[*Study door opens and Sowter appears.*]

MR. SOWTER (*calling*): Pond! (*After a moment*) Blast the feller. (*Turning back into study*) No sign of him yet—

[*Sowter disappears again into study.*]

[*The Pecks enter from school by double doors. Both very worried.*]

MRS. PECK: Well, really, it all seems very queer, dear.

MR. PECK: Yes. I want to sit down. (*He pulls out chair for her and then sits also.*)

MRS. PECK: No Julia. Miss Whitchurch decidedly not herself.

MR. PECK: Mrs. Pond, you mean.

MRS. PECK: That's another thing—married for fifteen years and never mentioned it.

MR. PECK: Such things are not for us to question. After all, marriages are made in heaven—

MRS. PECK (*idly glancing at letters on table*): Yes, dear, but this one was in Australia . . . (*Seeing particular letter*) Why, what a surprise—right in front of my eyes . . . a letter from Julia. (*Picks it up.*)

MR. PECK (*moving to look*): Left here for the post, presumably.

MRS. PECK (*turning it*): It's not even stuck up. (*Opens letter.*)

MR. PECK: D'you think you should . . . ?

MRS. PECK: Well, it's addressed to us. (*Reading in a pleased tone* . . . "went for a nature study ramble

this morning . . . ” (*Suddenly puzzled*) How can she have written that when she’s not back from it yet?

[*They look at one another. Sowter enters angrily from study, followed by Mrs. Sowter.*]

MR. SOWTER: Look here—I haven’t got all afternoon . . . (*As he sees Pecks*) Huh—more of the staff, I presume?

MR. PECK: Er—no. We’re parents.

MR. SOWTER: Oh. So are we.

MRS. SOWTER: Yes.

MRS. PECK: Really? My husband and I were just saying, we’re rather worried about conditions here—

MR. SOWTER: I’m not surprised.

MRS. SOWTER: Disgraceful.

MR. PECK: Well, I wouldn’t put it as strongly as that—

MR. SOWTER: Wouldn’t you? What about the fancy needlework? Have you seen these? (*He snatches up something from the table. It turns out to be the lace-edged knickers. Staring at them*) Good God! It’s worse than I thought!

MRS. PECK: Well, that sort of thing comes in very useful, you know—

MRS. SOWTER (*outraged*): Useful!

MRS. PECK (*nodding*): When they’re grown up.

MR. SOWTER (*choking*): When they’re—

MR. PECK: What we feel more concerned about is our daughter’s mental and physical well-being—don’t we, dear?

MR. SOWTER: Your daughter’s? What’s that got to do with it?

[*Miss Whitchurch has come downstairs. She starts in horror as she sees the Sowters and the Pecks together, and hurries in.*]

WHITCHURCH (*to Sowters*): I’m sorry, but I can’t

have two lots of parents in here at the same time.
It's—er—it's against the rules.

MR. SOWTER (*to Mrs. Sowter*): Another of 'em!

MRS. SOWTER: Fantastic!

WHITCHURCH: I beg your pardon.

MR. SOWTER (*to Miss Whitchurch, rudely*): I want to see Pond.

WHITCHURCH (*with asperity*): Mr. Pond is otherwise engaged.

MRS. PECK (*to Miss Whitchurch*): Mrs. Pond—there's something I don't understand—

MR. SOWTER: *Mrs. Pond*—you must be his mother!

WHITCHURCH (*livid*): I am nothing of the kind!

MR. PECK: It was a surprise to us too—we'd no idea they were married.

MRS. SOWTER: Married!

MR. SOWTER: This is the last straw! It was bad enough when I found out he kept women here!

[*The Pecks stare in astonishment.*]

WHITCHURCH (*hurriedly to Pecks*): If you wouldn't mind waiting in the study—

MRS. PECK (*letter in hand*): But there's something I must ask about Julia—

WHITCHURCH (*firmly*): Julia later. Please.

[*Miss Whitchurch ushers the Pecks firmly into the study and closes the door on them.*]

MR. SOWTER (*suspiciously*): Julia? Who's she?

WHITCHURCH: Er—the school mascot. She's—er—she's a nanny goat. Now, Mr. Sowter, if you wouldn't mind, there's a waiting room just along the—

MR. SOWTER (*furious*): Another waiting room—

[*Joyce enters from school.*]

JOYCE (*as she enters, to Miss Whitchurch*): It's all right—he's taken them down . . .

WHITCHURCH (*hurriedly*): Quite, quite, Miss Harper . . . (*To the Sowters*) Er—this is a cousin of mine . . .

MRS. SOWTER: Cousin?

MR. SOWTER: I thought she was your niece by marriage.

JOYCE (*hastily*): I—er—I'm Pond's niece by his first wife.

MR. SOWTER: His niece by his first wife. . . . ? Sounds illegal to me.

[*Barbara enters agitatedly and quickly by french windows and dashes up to Miss Whitchurch.*]

BARBARA (*breathlessly*): Miss Whitchurch—I was down by the baths—and I just saw one of the boys—with a whole lot of . . .

WHITCHURCH (*severely*): Barbara. Don't tell stories.

MR. SOWTER (*ominously*): Another of Pond's nieces, I suppose?

WHITCHURCH: Barbara is one of my little girls—nothing whatever to do with Mr. Pond.

BARBARA (*to Sowters*): How d'you do? I'm Barbara Cahoun—not spelt Colquhoun.

MR. SOWTER (*puzzled*): A Cahoun?

BARBARA (*persistently*): Miss Whitchurch—

WHITCHURCH (*angrily*): Barbara—that will do. (*She pinches her arm.*)

BARBARA (*with an outraged squeak*): Oh, Miss Whitchurch!

WHITCHURCH (*to Sowters*): She hasn't got used to my married name yet.

MR. SOWTER (*bewildered*): Yes, but if she's your little girl and her name's Cahoun, and you were Miss Whitchurch before you married Pond, she must be a little . . .

MRS. SOWTER: Edgar!

MR. SOWTER (*angrily*): There's something fishy going on here—

BARBARA: There's something fishy down at the baths—

WHITCHURCH (*severely*): Barbara!

MR. SOWTER: Oh, yes, there is. And I want to see Pond—

[*The study door opens and Mr. and Mrs. Peck enter. Mrs. Peck still holding Julia's letter.*]

MR. PECK (*with an air of determination*): Miss Whitchurch—my wife and I have been talking and we demand—yes, demand—to see Julia at once.

MRS. PECK (*indicating letter*): There's something very peculiar going on—

MR. SOWTER: That's just what *I* said—

MR. PECK: What have you done with Julia?

MR. SOWTER: Never mind about the blessed goat—I want to see Pond!

MR. PECK (*outraged*): You—you—call my daughter a goat, sir!

MR. SOWTER: I never mentioned your daughter—

MR. PECK: Oh, yes, you did.

MR. SOWTER (*shouting*): I did not!

[*Mrs. Peck goes to her husband's support. Mrs. Sowter ranges herself beside Sowter. As all speak simultaneously their words are indecipherable. Rainbow passes double doors.*]

WHITCHURCH (*agitatedly above the uproar*): Rainbow—Rainbow . . .

RAINBOW (*bitterly, as he enters*): If I've got to change them ruddy contraptions again—

[*Hopcroft runs in agitatedly at french windows.*]

HOPCROFT: Miss Whitchurch! Miss Harper!

[*The Sowters and Pecks break off from quarrelling.*]

HOPCROFT: They're coming up the drive!

JOYCE: Who are?

HOPCROFT: Miss Gossage and the girls!

MR. SOWTER: *Gossage and the girls!*

MRS. PECK: Does that include Julia?

WHITCHURCH: Of course. The whole school. (*With sudden terrible misgiving, to Hopcroft*) Then who have we sent those clothes to—down at the baths?

RAINBOW: Who d'you think it is—

WHITCHURCH: Silence, Rainbow!

MRS. PECK (*indicating letter*): I still don't understand—

MRS. SOWTER (*angrily*): Silence!

MR. PECK (*furiously*): How dare you address my wife—

MR. SOWTER: *I want to see Pond!*

[*All these last speeches are simultaneous. As the row is at its height, Pond, Billings and Tassell enter at french windows. They are dressed as schoolgirls in gym frocks, panama hats, white socks. Pond has a broad pale blue sash across his chest with "Captain" embroidered on it in puce. All three are beaming hopefully. The Sowters and Pecks stare aghast. Rainbow and Hopcroft round on each other. Joyce covers her eyes. And as Miss Gossage enters breezily by double doors, Miss Whitchurch faints into her arms.*]

[*Curtain.*]

ACT THREE

Two hours later. The scene is unchanged, except that the needlework and letters have disappeared from centre table.

Miss Whitchurch is by the small table downstage of fireplace, speaking on the telephone. Her manner is exasperated in the extreme. Miss Gossage stands at her elbow.

WHITCHURCH (*into telephone*): Hullo! Hullo! Ministry of Devacuation? . . . I must have Mr. Frap-hampton's home address . . . (*Angrily*) What d'you mean, you thought I'd got it? (*To Miss Gossage*) He says I must have it. (*Into telephone*) Don't be ridiculous! Hullo! Hullo! Give me Mr. Frap-hampton's secretary . . . You thought what? . . .

[*Billings, in sports coat and grey flannels, enters at front door and comes in by double doors. He is dusty and very hot.*]

(*Continuing into telephone*) If I were his secretary would I be asking for her? . . . Oh, this is hopeless! I suppose that is the Ministry of Devac . . . I am not! I'm speaking to them. Will you get off my line? (*Clicking telephone*) Hullo, hullo! Exchange! Exchange . . .

[*Pond enters agitatedly from study. He is back in his academic attire.*]

POND (*seeing Billings*): Found anything?

BILLINGS (*exhaustedly*): Not even a cowshed!

WHITCHURCH (*exasperatedly into phone*): Exchange! Exchange!

GOSSAGE (*turning to Billings and smiling sympathetically*): Nothing vacant?

BILLINGS (*bitterly*): Apart from the faces of the

population—no. (*He finds his handkerchief inadequate for mopping, goes to locker, gets out Hilary Hall scarf and mops with that.*)

WHITCHURCH (*angrily into telephone*): What do you mean, number please? I'm through to a number—(*She starts clicking again.*)

POND (*to Billings*): I've been trying to telephone the Ministry. All I could get was some fool of a female saying "Hullo, hullo!"—so in the end I . . .

WHITCHURCH (*into telephone*): Hullo, hullo!

POND: Eh?

.

[*He reacts strongly as they both stare at Miss Whitchurch.*]

WHITCHURCH (*into telephone*): I tell you I was speaking to London, but some mentally deficient numbskull of a man was on my line. Will you tell me what I can do? (*Very severely*) For that vulgarity I shall report you to the supervisor. Give me the super . . .

BILLINGS: I shouldn't bother. (*Moves D.R. to telephone.*)

POND (*to Miss Whitchurch*): I should have told you. That telephone's a party line to one in my study

BILLINGS: And you two were having the party!

WHITCHURCH (*to Pond, as she realises*): You mean—I've been wasting my time talking to you?

POND (*with umbrage*): And vice versa.

GOSSAGE: If you ask me, it's utterly imposs. How can we produce another set of premises by six o'clock?

BILLINGS: On a Saturday too, when even the nearest agents are half-day, as well as half dead!

WHITCHURCH: I'd better try again. (*Cross to telephone.*)

BILLINGS: You haven't a hope—not now you've wielded the supervisor over their heads.

WHITCHURCH (*at phone*): Hullo, hullo . . .

POND (*who can't bear to hear her*): Let me. (*He takes telephone from Miss Whitchurch, who surrenders it somewhat unwillingly. The others watch anxiously.*) (*Into telephone, with abject politeness*) Oh, good afternoon! I—I wonder if I could possibly trouble you to secure me a number? It's rather a long way off, I'm afraid. You can? Oh, splendid! (*He beams and nods at the others*) I want Whitehall one one double one. One one. Yes. This is Little Upton 02. (*Louder*) 02—0 for nought and T for two. What? Oh, that's very good of you! Thank you! (*He rings off. Jubilantly*) They're going to ring me.

[*Tassell and Joyce enter at french windows. Tassell is now in sports coat and grey flannels, Joyce is in a summer dress. Pond, Miss Gossage and Miss Whitchurch turn expectantly as they enter.*]

BILLINGS (*crushing their hopes*): Well—it's obvious *they* haven't found anything.

TASSELL: How did you guess?

BILLINGS: If I couldn't, with my mind on the job—

TASSELL: Now listen, if you're suggesting—

POND: Oh, come, come, this is no time for squabbling and chiff-chaff.

GOSSAGE (*trying to be helpful*): The chiff-chaff is a bird, I think.

POND (*irritatedly*): Well, chitter-chatter, then.

WHITCHURCH: Mr. Pond's quite right. Now's the time for team work. Two heads are better than one.

BILLINGS: Not in this establishment.

[*Miss Whitchurch glares at him.*]

JOYCE (*to Miss Whitchurch*): What did Mr. Peck say exactly?

WHITCHURCH: Unless we can find somewhere else by six o'clock, he'll feel morally obliged to withdraw his daughter, and inform all the other parents of his reasons for so doing.

TASSELL (*to Pond*): And the Sowters said the same thing to you?

POND: Not in so many words.

BILLINGS: I can believe that.

JOYCE: They must know we can't possibly do it.

WHITCHURCH: The Pecks are already packing Julia's things.

BILLINGS: We might just as well start packing ours.

POND: Oh, that it should come to this!

[*The telephone bell rings.*]

(*Excitedly*) That'll be the Ministry!

[*There is a concerted dash towards the telephone. Tassell is nearest, and gets it first.*]

TASSELL (*into telephone*): Hullo—

[*Billings wrenches it from his hand.*]

BILLINGS (*into telephone*): I sthat the Ministry of Whatever-it-is—

WHITCHURCH (*irritably grabs it from him. Into phone*): Hullo, hullo! St. Swithin's here—

POND (*seizes it from her—into phone*): Hullo, hullo! This is Hilary Hall. Said what just now? (*Exasperatedly*) Oh, very well, then . . . St. Hithin's and Swilary Hall. Yes, yes . . . what?

WHITCHURCH (*at his elbow*): Speak to them severely.

TASSELL (*at his other elbow*): Tell them it's life and death!

GOSSAGE (*behind his ear*): Pitch it hot and strong!

POND (*agitatedly into phone*): I can't hear you—

WHITCHURCH (*taking this for her, and shouting*): I said speak to them—

POND (*furious*): Silence, boys! I mean—everyone—

[*The uproar subsides*]

(*Into telephone*) Hullo! . . . What I said was . . . You said what? . . . Eh? . . . Oh. Oh. Oh. (*Without*

a word he replaces the receiver. In a voice of doom)
Closed till Monday.

ALL: Oh!

[There is general despair. Rainbow enters at windows U.C.]

RAINBOW (*to Pond*): Beg pardon, sir . . .

POND (*irritably*): Oh, whatever it is, Rainbow, what is it?

RAINBOW: I only wanted to be suggestive.

[All stare at him.]

WHITCHURCH (*to Miss Gossage*): I knew his glands wanted seeing to.

POND (*hurriedly to Rainbow*): Thank you, Rainbow, not now.

RAINBOW: You don't want to hear it, then?

BILLINGS: If it's one of those limericks—certainly not.

RAINBOW (*shrugging*): I just thought they might do—for temporary housing, so to speak. (*He starts to turn away.*)

TASSELL: Housing!

BILLINGS: You haven't found something?

[Rainbow pauses.]

POND: Oh, incredible!

GOSSAGE: You wizard man!

WHITCHURCH: What is it?

JOYCE: Where is it?

RAINBOW: In the field at the back of the halt. Three L.M.S. railway carriages.

WHITCHURCH (*aghast*): Rolling stock!

POND: Oh, but that's going a bit far, surely?

RAINBOW: They aren't going anywhere. They're disused railway carriages.

WHITCHURCH (*with scorn*): Three! For an entire school!

RAINBOW (*defensively*): There's eight compartments to a carriage. Four a side in each. That's sixty-four. Three carriages. A hundred and ninety-two in all.

BILLINGS (*to Tassell*): We could do with him on the teaching staff here.

RAINBOW: Sleep one on each rack and one on the seat, and there's still room for ninety-six.

TASSELL (*warming to the idea*): True enough! Knock off one carriage for classrooms—

RAINBOW: The guard's van for the staff—

JOYCE: And you've still got room for over sixty.

POND (*more enthusiastic*): By Jove, so you have!

WHITCHURCH (*also warming to the idea*): First class for the senior school—

POND: Third for the juniors!

GOSSAGE: Plenty of good healthy fresh air—

TASSELL: And every modern convenience—

BILLINGS: At each end of the corridor.

POND (*weightily*): I doubt if we'll do better.

WHITCHURCH (*nodding*) (*To Rainbow*): Rainbow, I congratulate you.

POND (*warmly*): Hear, hear! (*He wrings Rainbow by the hand.*)

RAINBOW: Mind you, they are being used for poultry, but if I know Jim Potter, you see him all right and he'll soon turn his chicks out.

BILLINGS (*to Miss Whitchurch*): And then you can turn your chicks in!

WHITCHURCH (*sharply*): Yours, you mean.

POND: You don't expect us to vacate our own premises?

WHITCHURCH: You don't expect us to sleep in railway carriages with laying hens?

POND: After all, L.M.S. Was a very good line, you know.

WHITCHURCH (*with great asperity*): Quite apart from any question of courtesy, do you think for one

moment that the Pecks would agree to it? Think of Julia—a delicate child—living in a railway carriage! BILLINGS: You could always put her in a non-smoker.

POND (*gloomy again*): I'd forgotten the parents.

JOYCE (*nodding*): If our Pecks would object, so would your Sowters, from what I've seen of them.

[*The others nod gloomily.*]

WHITCHURCH (*irritable, with a look at Rainbow*): Idiotic suggestion, Rainbow.

[*Rainbow bridles, annoyed.*]

POND (*hastily*): Thank you, Rainbow. You meant it for the best, I'm sure.

RAINBOW (*defensively, as he goes*): I still think it was feasible.

[*He goes out to school by double doors.*]

TASSELL: As far as I can see, there's only one hope left, and that's bribery.

WHITCHURCH (*stiffly*): Bribery? Of whom?

TASSELL: The packing parents upstairs. Dangle a little something in front of them to make them change their minds—or give us a few weeks' grace, anyway.

POND: Quite impracticable. The Sowters are rolling in money.

GOSSAGE: And the Pecks wouldn't look at it.

JOYCE: Money isn't the only thing. If we could only convince them that the children are doing better here than they would anywhere else . . . you know . . . top of the class, and so on.

WHITCHURCH (*scathingly*): Julia has been in the bottom class ever since she joined, and nearly always bottom of that. (*Weakening a little*) Of course, that does leave all the more scope for promotion.

GOSSAGE (*eagerly*): There's games, too—

POND (*with enthusiasm*): Games! The Sowters would jump at that. (*To Tassell*) Suppose you put little Cyril in the first eleven?

TASSELL (*grimly*): Half an hour and there'd only be ten.

GOSSAGE (*looking at watch*): Whatever we do, we'll have to pull our socks up. It's a quarter to six now. Their train goes at half-past.

POND (*nodding*): The last one, what's more.

BILLINGS (*suddenly*): We're mad—all of us!

TASSELL: Well—a little unhinged, perhaps—

BILLINGS: No, no— (*thinking to himself*). It's the obvious thing—

[*As he is speaking, Hopcroft appears at the double doors, from the direction of the school. He knocks at one of the open halves of the door, but all are looking eagerly at Billings.*]

POND (*impatiently*): Come, come, what is it, then?

HOPCROFT (*taking instruction for himself*): Please, sir, matron asked me to—

[*They all turn in surprise.*]

POND (*irritatedly*): Not you, Hopcroft. Wait a minute.

HOPCROFT: Yes, sir. (*He waits.*)

[*All turn back to Billings.*]

BILLINGS: It's simple. Don't let them catch the last train. If we can only see they miss it—

POND: There are no trains on Sunday.

BILLINGS: Everywhere's full up, and they'll have to stay here. That means they won't do anything till Monday.

TASSELL: And in the meantime, we can really go to work on them!

GOSSAGE (*excitedly*): A whole lot can happen in the next forty-eight hours.

BILLINGS: I should think so—judging by the last four!

WHITCHURCH: I might let Mr. Peck preach the sermon tomorrow—as a compensation for missing his train.

POND: Sowter can see the boys doing their early morning jerks—

TASSELL: And having cold showers—

JOYCE (*surprised*): Do they on Sundays?

TASSELL: They don't on week-days, but it's never too late to start.

POND: I'd better start delaying action straight away.

WHITCHURCH: I'll see to the Pecks.

POND (*about to turn away, when he thinks of something*): Wait a minute—what if they want a taxi ordered?

BILLINGS: Tell 'em you'll see to it—then don't.

POND (*horrified*): Go back on my own word? (*Cheerfully*) Good idea! (*He turns to go, sees Hopcroft*) What are you doing here?

HOPCROFT (*slightly aggrieved*): You told me to wait, sir.

POND: Oh. Did I? Well, what is it?

HOPCROFT (*handing him a note*): From Mrs. Hampstead, sir.

POND (*unfolds note and reads*): "From Matron. Kindly send someone. I wish to leave the room . . ."

WHITCHURCH (*stiffly*): Well, really—

POND (*to Billings and Tassell*): Oh, my goodness! I left her in charge of the boys, while we busied ourselves with the emergency.

TASSELL: That was over two hours ago!

BILLINGS: Now she's got an emergency of her own.

POND (*agitatedly*): Yes, yes. Well, one of us will have to relieve her. (*To Hopcroft*) All right, Hopcroft.

[*Hopcroft goes in direction of school.*]

(*To Billings and Tassell*) See to it, will you, one of you—

[*He goes out by double doors.*]

WHITCHURCH (*to Miss Gossage*): Where are the girls, Miss Gossage?

GOSSAGE: On the back lawn. I told them to snug down for an hour or two with Ruskin and Carlyle.

WHITCHURCH: Well, they'd better have a high tea.

BILLINGS: If it's that whale steak again, they probably will.

WHITCHURCH (*giving him a look*): There's nothing clever in carping at the catering.

[*Exeunt Whitchurch and Gossage, up C.*]

BILLINGS (*to Tassell*): Are you going to the relief of Hampstead, or am I?

TASSELL (*appealingly—glancing at Joyce*): R.B.—it may be my last chance—

BILLINGS: But you've just been out for two hours with the damn girl—

TASSELL (*exasperatedly*): We were looking for school buildings.

BILLINGS (*staring at him, astonished*): I believe you must have been.

[*He stares at Tassell, shakes his head incredulously, and taking list from his locker, goes out by double doors to school.*]

[*Tassell is looking hesitantly towards Joyce, trying to pluck up his courage. Joyce starts towards double doors.*]

TASSELL: Oh—Miss Harper . . .

[*Joyce pauses.*]

Miss Harper—Dick . . . no, that's my name . . . what I mean is . . . whatever happens now, it may be too late for anything to happen . . . and if we

separate, we shall have to part, so . . . so all afternoon—what I've wanted to say is . . .

[*During Tassell's speech Barbara comes past french windows and glances in, stops and advances into open window.*]

BARBARA: Oh, Miss Harper—

TASSELL (*vehemently*): Blast!

JOYCE (*innocently, to Tassell*): You wanted to say "Blast"?

TASSELL (*with feeling*): I wanted to say something very much worse than that.

JOYCE: Yes, Barbara?

BARBARA (*entering*): Can I speak to you, Miss Harper? (*With a meaning look at Tassell*) Alone. It's frightfully urgent.

[*Joyce looks apologetically at Tassell. Tassell raises his eyes in despair, and resignedly goes out by double doors to school. Joyce turns to Barbara enquiringly.*]

BARBARA (*triumphantly*): It was miles easier than I thought.

JOYCE (*puzzled*): What was?

BARBARA: Getting rid of Mr. Tassell.

JOYCE (*staring at her exasperatedly*): Do you mean to say . . .

BARBARA: I've noticed he's been pressing his unwelcome attentions on you for weeks now. And when you went off this afternoon— (*dramatically*) alone, in the secluded countryside—

JOYCE (*dryly*): What book have you been snuggling down with on the lawn?

BARBARA (*innocently*): "Sartor Resartus" by Carlyle.

JOYCE: Never mind what you were told to read. What were you reading?

BARBARA (*swallowing*): "The Fruits of Passion." I'm afraid it's not by Ruskin or Carlyle.

JOYCE: You'd better write out fifty times, "Fiction

is nearly always stranger than truth," and give it me by lunch time tomorrow.

BARBARA (*protesting*): Oh, Miss Harper—

JOYCE: Bring me that book, too.

BARBARA: But, Miss Harper—

JOYCE: And think yourself lucky I'm not giving you a misconduct mark for coming in here on false pretences.

[*Looking as severe as she can, she goes out to school.*]

[*Barbara stands for a moment in some dismay, looking after her. Hopcroft appears stealthily at french windows, and peers in, looking for someone.*]

HOPCROFT (*as he sees Barbara*): Psst! (*Coming in*) I say, have you heard the news?

BARBARA (*delightedly*): Yes! Isn't it absolutely top score!

HOPCROFT (*surprised*): Top score?

BARBARA: Well, if the Pecks are going to spill the beans, we'll have to break up and go home. I'm going to get my parents to engage Miss Harper as my private tutor.

HOPCROFT: Don't be crackers. It's all off.

BARBARA (*dismayed*): Why? What's happened?

HOPCROFT: They're going to make them miss the train and then go to work on them.

BARBARA (*mystified*): Who's going to work on who?

HOPCROFT: Your hags and our beaks are going to work on the Pecks and Sowters—to make them change their minds. We're going to have physical jerks all the week end, while you listen to a sermon from old Peck.

BARBARA (*appalled*): Gosh! What a plate of tapioca!

HOPCROFT: If we could only make sure they catch the six-thirty somehow—

BARBARA: Anything I can do, count me in.

HOPCROFT (*delighted*): Shake!

[*As they do, Pond comes down the stairs with Mr. and Mrs. Sowter.*]

BARBARA (*seeing them*): Cave!

[*They hurriedly dash out at the french windows and disappear to the right as Pond and Mr. and Mrs. Sowter enter at double doors.*]

POND (*as they come in*): The most remarkable boy of his age I've ever had, Mr. Sowter. (*Impressively*) Do you know, Mr. Tassell says he can't put him in the first eleven—it wouldn't be fair to the others.

MR. SOWTER: Doesn't sound like Cyril.

MRS. SOWTER: Doesn't.

POND (*defensively*): Well, it's true—literally. The best bowler we've ever had. And that's after only a few hours' coaching. Think what two or three years would do!

MR. SOWTER (*vehemently*): I know what two or three weeks have done. Prancing up here in a—a school-girl's what-d'you-call-it! And if that's not enough a form-master who's name is Daisy!

[*Hopcroft appears from school and knocks at double doors.*]

HOPCROFT: Excuse me, sir.

POND (*irritably*): What is it?

HOPCROFT: Excuse me, sir—but no one's come to take prep. (*Very clearly—with a look at the Sowters*) And it's past six o'clock, sir.

POND (*interrupting*): All right, Hopcroft—all right!

HOPCROFT (*persistently*): Quite a bit past six o'clock, sir.

MR. SOWTER (*looking at watch*): Yes, it is.

POND (*not thinking*): Nonsense.

MRS. SOWTER (*outraged*): Nonsense?

POND (*hastily, to Hopcroft*): I mean—nonsense. You won't miss the train . . . (*Agitatedly to Sowter, cor-*

recting himself) I mean . . . run along and wait for prep. (*Desperately to Hopcroft*) That will do, Hopcroft.

HOPCROFT: Yes, sir.

[*He goes out to school.*]

POND (*mopping his forehead. To Sowter*): Now Mr. Sowter, leave the young man with me, and I'm sure—

MR. SOWTER (*firmly*): Mr. Pond, have you or have you not disposed of that schoolful of women?

POND (*unhappily*): Well—not absolutely—but I have the highest hopes . . .

MRS. SOWTER (*bluntly*): Luggage.

POND (*taken aback*): I beg your pardon?

MR. SOWTER: We want the boy's luggage brought down.

POND (*agitatedly*): Oh, no.

MRS. SOWTER (*formidably*): No?

POND (*intimidated*): No trouble at all.

[*Billings enters from the school. He has school list with him.*]

(*Anxious for help*) Oh, Billings . . .

BILLINGS: Yes, sir?

POND: Mr. Sowter was just saying—his boy's bags ought to be taken down.

BILLINGS (*surprised, but pleased*): I entirely agree with him.

POND (*aghast*): What?

BILLINGS: Six of the best do him all the good in the world.

[*The Sowters glare.*]

MR. SOWTER (*angrily*): I'm asking for the boy's trunk to be dealt with.

BILLINGS: So am I.

MR. SOWTER (*to Pond, impatiently*): Are you going to see to it, or must I?

[*Billings is staring at him, bewildered by the conversation.*]

POND (*hastily*): No, no, not you! We'll attend to it. Er—Billings, ring for Rainbow, will you not, and ask him to bring down Sowter's luggage.

BILLINGS (*enlightened*): Oh—luggage.

MR. SOWTER (*to Pond*): You ordered the taxi for six-fifteen, didn't you?

POND: Oh, rather not—I mean . . .

BILLINGS (*interrupting, hastily, to Pond*): You're not letting them go without showing them the mark?

POND (*confused*): Mark?

BILLINGS (*frowning at him*): On the Pavilion—where young Sowter hit our best bowler for a sixer.

POND (*getting the idea*): Oh, that one!

MR. SOWTER: I thought you said Cyril was your best bowler?

POND (*thinking fast*): Our—er—best *googly* bowler. But what a batsman! Follow me.

MR. SOWTER (*still dubious*): Hit a sixer into the pavilion? Cyril? Is this some cock and bull story?

POND: No, no! Bat and ball. Come along, and I'll show you while you're waiting.

[*As the Sowters make to protest.*]

Please—I insist! It won't take five minutes!

[*He hastily starts to conduct the Sowters to the french windows.*]

MR. SOWTER (*pausing—to Billings*): Don't forget to tell that porter to—

BILLINGS (*smiling disarmingly*): Don't worry, sir. I know just what to tell the porter. (*He and Pond exchange glances.*)

[*Pond conducts the Sowters out by the french windows and off to the left. As Billings turns to go to locker, Rainbow enters from school.*]

(*Surprised*) I didn't ring for you.

RAINBOW (*aggrieved*): I never said you did, Mr. Billings.

BILLINGS (*aggressively*): Well, don't bring down young Sowter's trunk, then.

RAINBOW (*offended*): I wasn't going to. Letter for the Head. (*He shows he is holding a buff-coloured envelope.*)

BILLINGS: Oh.

RAINBOW (*jerking head towards study*): Is he in there?

BILLINGS: No. Out in the grounds. Better put it in the study.

RAINBOW (*looking at envelope*): O.H.M.S. Income Tax, it looks like.

BILLINGS: Well, he's in no mood for it now.

[*Rainbow nods, and goes to study.*]

[*Billings goes to locker to put away list, taking out some things to tidy it. Miss Gossage enters from school. Her face lights up as she sees Billings.*]

GOSSAGE (*blithely*): Ah! Daisy!

[*Billings spills half the contents of locker.*]

There! You are an old butter-fingers! (*Crossing to him*) I shall have to teach you to be tidy. Pick them up, now! Come along!

[*Billings, giving her a bitter look, starts to pick things up and cram them back into locker. Rainbow enters from study.*]

GOSSAGE (*to Billings, as to a child*): No, no—not like that . . . Let Sausage show you . . . (*Taking things from him.*)

[*Rainbow gives them a dry look, and exits to school.*]

(*As she starts to put things away*) What a lot of useless odds and ends you seem to have collected.
BILLINGS (*dryly*): Yes—I want to avoid collecting any more.

GOSSAGE: Look at this—last year's calendar—leap year, wasn't it?

BILLINGS (*firmly*): Last year—yes. (*Takes calendar from her and tears it up.*)

GOSSAGE: Of course I think it's all bosh, anyway—about women proposing in leap year, don't you?

BILLINGS (*relieved*): Oh, absolute bosh!

GOSSAGE (*moving a little closer*): I mean—I don't see why they can't propose in any year, can you?

BILLINGS (*recoiling*): Oh, no—

GOSSAGE (*advancing*): Lots of men are simply head over heels in love and just don't realise it.

BILLINGS (*retreating*): Oh yes, they do . . . I mean, no, they don't . . . I mean . . .

GOSSAGE (*tenderly*): Daisy—

BILLINGS (*desperately*): Look out! You'll drop that!

[*He grabs at things and they fall. He quickly picks them up and puts them in locker.*]

GOSSAGE: I am in the awkward squad, aren't I? (*Coily*) That was your fault! (*She fumbles at the last of the things she is holding—the folding leather photograph frame. In her agitation it unfolds.*) (*Surprised*) Who are these four?

BILLINGS: Those? . . . (*Clutching at a straw*) Oh, these. Oh, didn't I ever show you them? (*Taking them from her and showing photographs*) That was my wife—Milly . . .

GOSSAGE (*dismayed*): Wife! I didn't know you were married once!

BILLINGS: Not once. Three times.

GOSSAGE (*appalled*): Three times! .

BILLINGS (*calmly*): That's the second one—Tilly. And that's my present wife—Lily. I expect to inherit a lot of money from her. Even more than I did from the other two.

GOSSAGE (*weakly, pointing to last picture*): Who—who's this one, then?

BILLINGS: Billie? Oh, she's my fiancée. I'm going to marry her as soon as poor Lily pops off. (*Briskly*) Well, so long!

[*He gives her the frame, smiles at her cheerfully and goes out by french windows.*]

[*Miss Gossage stares aghast at the photographs. Miss Whitchurch, now in cap and gown, and Mr. and Mrs. Peck enter at double doors. As they do so, Miss Gossage turns away to put photographs in Billings' locker.*]

MR. PECK: But mathematics have always been Julia's weakest subject. It's quite miraculous— (*To Mrs. Peck*) Isn't it, dear?

MRS. PECK (*quite innocently*): I think it's incredible!

WHITCHURCH (*with a forced laugh*): That's hardly complimentary to our teaching staff—is it, Miss Gossage? (*Gossage is gazing unhappily into space*) I'm sure Miss Gossage will tell you—as I have—that . . . (*She sees Miss Gossage's peculiar expression.*) (*Concerned*) Miss Gossage—you don't look yourself—

GOSSAGE (*faintly*): It's nothing, Miss Whitchurch—just the shock, that's all.

WHITCHURCH: Shock?

GOSSAGE: About Daisy—Mr. Billings—being married three times.

WHITCHURCH: What?

[*The Pecks are staring.*]

MRS. PECK: Three times!

GOSSAGE (*her indignation boiling over*): And only

waiting for Lily to pop off before he goes it again!

[*Overcome with emotion, she turns and dashes out by french windows.*]

[*There is a momentary shocked silence.*]

MR. PECK (*more in sorrow than in anger*): You see, Miss Whitchurch—this sort of environment—to a sensitive child—

WHITCHURCH (*pained*): You surely don't believe what you've just heard?

MRS. PECK (*bewildered*): Shouldn't we?

WHITCHURCH: Of course not. Poor Miss Gossage! One should sympathise. Overwork, you know. She's—she's been having hallucinations.

MRS. PECK: Hallucinations!

WHITCHURCH (*cheerfully confident*): Nothing at all to worry about. Just persecution and sex. I'm having her thoroughly psycho-analysed—twice a week. That'll soon put a stop to it.

MR. PECK: None the less—

WHITCHURCH: None the less, as you say, that is nothing to do with Julia. As I was telling you, her vulgar fractions have suddenly taken a turn for the better. And as for her languages, all this week—well, I simply can't tell you!

MR. PECK (*impressed, in spite of himself*): Really? I can't think why the child's made no mention of it.

WHITCHURCH: A very modest girl.

MRS. PECK (*remembering something*): But she said in her letter she got an omega for French—don't you remember, Edward?

MR. PECK (*puzzled*): So she did.

WHITCHURCH: Quite impossible—I marked her myself. (*Brightly*) Of course! That accounts for it. It's that wretched alpha of mine—always getting mistaken for my omega! (*Firmly*) No, no, I do assure you, Julia's really showing the most unexpected

promise. (*Impressively*) I wonder what you'd say if I told you that there *are* such things as scholarships to Oxford—

MRS. PECK: Miss Whitchurch—you're not suggesting—

WHITCHURCH: Who knows? Early days yet. But I will say one thing—the air here seems to be working wonders.

MRS. PECK (*impressed*): It seems almost a pity to take her out of it. (*to Mr. Peck*) Doesn't it, Edward?

WHITCHURCH (*before he can answer*): Of course it does. Oh, leave her. Let her breathe away for all she's worth.

[*During her speech, Barbara peers in at french windows—sees Miss Whitchurch and the Pecks, and with sudden decision, comes in. She has a book with a lurid-looking dust-jacket in her hand.*]

BARBARA: Oh, Miss Whitchurch—excuse me—

WHITCHURCH (*benevolently*): Yes, dear—what is it?

BARBARA (*coming down to her*): Just a book, Miss Whitchurch. Miss Harper asked me to bring it in to her.

WHITCHURCH (*taking book without looking at it*): Thank you, Barbara. (*Turning to Pecks, as Barbara goes again by french windows*) There's another thing. St. Swithin's has always paid particular attention to general culture. We of the staff not only share their lessons, we share their pleasures, too—help to mould their tastes during the most formative years. Miss Harper, for instance, has quite a genius for interesting the girls in the right kind of literature—

[*During this, she has been gesturing, with the book in her hand. Mrs. Peck is staring at it.*]

MRS. PECK (*in a strained voice*): Excuse me. (*She takes book, looks at it, and passes it to Mr. Peck*) Edward—

[*Mr. Peck looks at book, reacts in silence, and hands it to Miss Whitchurch. She looks at it, and reacts with some force.*]

WHITCHURCH (*in a strangled voice*): "The Fruits of Passion."

MR. PECK: I'm afraid, in the circumstances—

[*Mr. and Mrs. Sowter enter at french windows, followed by Pond, who looks worried and unhappy.*]

WHITCHURCH: I know what you're going to say, Mr. Peck, but don't say it. Things aren't always what they seem.

MR. SOWTER (*indignantly*): You're telling me! (*Indignantly*) Spend ten minutes looking for a mark, and when we find it, it's a fake! Whoever heard of a cricket ball with hobnails on it!

MRS. SOWTER: Unlikely.

MR. SOWTER: Yes—and so's the story of Cyril hitting a six. (*He glares at Pond.*)

POND: I assure you, Mr. Sowter—

MRS. PECK (*looking at watch*): Talking of six, it's nearly twenty past—

MR. SOWTER: Twenty past!

MR. PECK (*to Miss Whitchurch*): Yes, I'm sorry, Miss Whitchurch, but we must go.

WHITCHURCH (*firmly*): Not without Julia's ration book. Come into the study, please.

[*The Pecks follow her into study.*]

MR. SOWTER (*ferociously, to Pond*): Where's my boy and his trunk?

POND (*intimidated*): I'll see to it, Mr. Sowter—I'll see the porter immediately—

[*He is about to go to double doors, when Tassell enters by french windows.*]

(*Relieved to see him*) Ah—Tassell . . .

TASSELL: You haven't seen Miss Harper?

POND (*exasperated*): Never mind Miss Harper. I was telling Mr. Sowter about Cyril's cricket exploits— (*With an attempt at jocular*) but he seems to doubt my veracity. Now you tell him— tell him in detail.

[*He looks meaningfully at Tassell.*]

TASSELL (*coming to the Sowters*): Well, sir—in my opinion your boy is the finest wicket-keeper we've ever had.

MR. SOWTER: Wicket-keeper? He was a bowler ten minutes ago! How the blazes can he do both at the same time?

TASSELL (*weakly*): Well, he might have a sort of split personality—

MR. SOWTER (*angrily*): Split my foot!

[*Hopcroft enters by french windows.*]

HOPCROFT (*to Pond*): Please, sir—Mr. Sowter's taxi's here.

POND (*aghast*): What!

TASSELL (*to Hopcroft*): Don't be silly, it can't be! (*Anxiously, to Pond*) Can it?

POND: Not as far as I'm concerned.

HOPCROFT: Well, it *is*, sir. He says he's Mr. Sowter's.

[*Tassell exasperatedly shoos Hopcroft out by french windows.*]

MR. SOWTER (*furiously, to Pond*): Are you going to speak to that porter, or aren't you?

POND: To tell you the truth, I'm not quite sure of his whereabouts—

MR. SOWTER: If you can't find his whereabouts, I will! (*To Mrs. Sowter*) Hilda!

[*He leads the way purposefully towards double doors, Mrs. Sowter following.*]

(*As they go*) You look upstairs—I'll look down.
(*Shouting, as they go out*) Porter! Porter, blast you—
[*Exeunt Mr. and Mrs. Sowter.*]

POND (*to Tassell, defeatedly*): I think we've had it.
TASSELL (*eagerly*): There's still a chance—if I can find Rainbow first, tell him to do a vanishing act—
[*He dashes out at double doors.*]

[*Miss Whitchurch enters by study door.*]

WHITCHURCH (*exasperatedly, to Pecks, in study*): I'll find it, Mrs. Peck—of course I will. Just wait, and don't worry. (*She shuts door abruptly and turns. There is a look of desperation in her eye.*) (*A little breathlessly, to Pond*) Julia's ration book. (*Producing it from under her jumper*) It was in the drawer—but I managed to palm it.

POND (*suspiciously*): Did you order a taxi?

WHITCHURCH: Certainly not.

POND: One's come.

WHITCHURCH: What!

POND: If the Sowters don't take it, the Pecks will.

WHITCHURCH (*forcefully*): Something must be done about it!

POND (*despairingly*): What, for instance?

WHITCHURCH: I—I don't know . . . something drastic . . . (*As an idea dawns*) Of course! If he did it, so can we!

POND: If who did what?

WHITCHURCH: Hopcroft. We'll puncture its back tyres!

POND: Back tyres?

WHITCHURCH: The taxi's back tyres!

POND: We can't do that it's—it's trespass, or something.

WHITCHURCH: Desperate moments call for desperate measures. (*Urgently*) I wonder what he did it with?

POND: A pen-knife—but you won't go far with that.

WHITCHURCH (*desperately*): There must be something—somewhere—

[*With an air of determination she drops Julia's ration book on the table and hurries to french windows. Billings, entering at french windows, almost collides with her. She glares at him and hurries on out.*]

BILLINGS (*coming down to Pond*): What's happened now?

POND: A taxi's arrived. Someone's done the dirty.

[*Sowter enters indignantly by double doors, followed by Rainbow, followed by Mrs. Sowter.*]

MR. SOWTER (*indignantly to Pond*): I found him, and what do I find? He says he was told *not* to bring it down!

POND (*to Rainbow*): Don't be ridiculous, Rainbow. Why should anyone tell you not to bring down a boy's trunk?

RAINBOW (*with an accusing look*): Mr. Billings—

POND (*sharply*): Rainbow! I want no excuses. Fetch down Master Sowter's trunk.

RAINBOW (*sulkily*): Yes, sir.

MR. SOWTER: *And* tuck-box.

RAINBOW (*on the verge of mutiny*): Yes, sir.

[*He glares at Billings, and goes towards double doors. Tassell enters rapidly by french windows.*]

TASSELL (*as he enters, to Pond, elatedly*): It may be all right! I couldn't find Rainbow . . . (*He breaks off as he sees Rainbow*) Oh. The homo has missed the omnibus.

[*Rainbow goes out by double doors as Mr. and Mrs. Peck enter from study.*]

MR. PECK (*anxiously*): I'm sorry—but has anyone seen Miss Whitchurch . . .

[*Miss Whitchurch enters rapidly by french windows.*]

WHITCHURCH (*triumphantly, as she enters*): Here we are—I've got the very thing!

[*She reveals that she is carrying a large axe—pulls up in dismay as she sees the Pecks and Sowters. All stare at her.*]

MR. SOWTER: What in the name of thunder . . . !

WHITCHURCH (*awkwardly, to the Pecks*): I—er—had to break the safe open—for Julia's ration book.

MRS. PECK (*eagerly*): You have it, then?

WHITCHURCH: Er—no. It wasn't in it.

[*Mr. Peck is looking at the table.*]

MR. PECK: Wait a minute—it's on here!

WHITCHURCH (*defeated*): Oh—is it?

[*Mr. Peck has picked up ration book.*]

MR. PECK: That's splendid! I think we did hear our cab drive up.

MRS. SOWTER (*formidably*): Ours!

MR. SOWTER (*aggressively*): Don't you dare take that one!

MR. PECK: Really, sir—I've no desire to take your taxi—

MRS. PECK: We asked Miss Whitchurch to order one.

TASSELL: Oh well, that won't be here.

[*Miss Whitchurch glares.*]

I mean—not for a while. And then, of course, there's *your* luggage—

[*Barbara enters to double doors from school.*]

BARBARA: Excuse me, Miss Whitchurch—but we've brought down Julia's trunk and things—

WHITCHURCH: What! Who has?

BARBARA: Some of the other girls and me. We couldn't find Rainbow anywhere, and we didn't want them to miss the train.

[*She beams in an artlessly friendly way and goes quickly out again to school.*]

WHITCHURCH: Dear, thoughtful child! (*Handling the axe menacingly*) I must remember to give her a mark of some kind—

TASSELL: It's sabotage—that's what it is—sabotage!

MR. SOWTER (*angrily*): Nothing but inefficiency! Their trunk and no taxi. Our taxi and no trunk.

BILLINGS: There's life for you!

MR. SOWTER: Two minutes, and we'll go without the trunk.

MR. PECK (*timidly*): In that case, perhaps you could sandwich us in—

MR. SOWTER (*explosively*): Sandwich you! I'm—

MRS. SOWTER: Edgar!

MR. SOWTER: Eh?

MRS. SOWTER: Clergyman.

MR. SOWTER: Oh. (*Reluctantly*) Well—yes—all right . . . (*He goes to side table, starts impatiently flipping over magazine on it.*)

WHITCHURCH: Pond, are you going to stand there and accept defeat?

POND (*desperately*): Mr. Sowter—Mrs. Sowter—Mr. and Mrs. Peck . . . I appeal to you—for the sake of your boy and girl. Think of your own school-days . . . the happiest days of your life . . .

MR. SOWTER: Nonsense.

TASSELL: Well, if you'd spent them here, perhaps they might have been—

POND: After all, what harm's been done?

MR. SOWTER (*furiously*): What harm? Turning my boy into a little . . .

BILLINGS (*before Mrs. Sowter can speak*): Edgar!

[*Both Sowters glare furiously at him.*]

POND (*to Mr. Peck*): I put it to you, sir. Look at . . . look at Noah's ark . . . they went into that two by two—

MR. PECK: Possibly, but not for educational purposes.

WHITCHURCH (*shocked*): Mr. Peck, if you're suggesting—

[*Sowter turns suddenly with Misconduct Mark Book from table.*]

MR. SOWTER: No harm done, he says! Look at this! A book full of misconduct!

MRS. SOWTER: Misconduct?

MR. SOWTER (*reading from cover*): "St. Swithin's School, Misconduct Marks." (*Outraged*) Why, dammit, they even give marks for it! (*To Mrs. Sowter*) Come on, Hilda, we're going!

POND (*desperately*): No! No! You can't! Not without Cyril's ration book. (*He goes out to study.*)

[*Billings hurriedly takes book from Sowter.*]

BILLINGS: You've got it all wrong, sir. You've only got to read the entries. All perfectly innocent. Look at this one . . . "Eleanor Gribble . . . refused to eat gribble . . ."

WHITCHURCH (*severely*): The word is gristle.

BILLINGS (*continuing*): Here's some other ones. "Pamela Withers . . . called Miss Whitchurch a . . ." Well, never mind that one. "Julia Peck . . ." (*Smiling at Pecks*) Ah, Julia Peck . . . "left her chisel on the floor." (*With asperity*) So that's who it was! (*Reading on*) "Peggy Hobson . . . caught in dormitory with *The Four Just Men* . . ." That sounds a bit—oh, I see. "Daphne Carruthers . . ."

MR. SOWTER (*angrily*): Are you trying to waste our time?

BILLINGS: Yes. I mean—

MR. SOWTER: We're going, then.

MR. PECK: So are we.

MR. SOWTER (*aggressively, to Billings*): 'Tell Pond he can put the ration book . . .

BILLINGS and TASSELL: Edgar!

MR. SOWTER: . . . in the trunk, and send it on.

[*The Pecks and the Sowters start for the double doors. Pond bursts in from study, waving letter in one hand and buff envelope in the other.*]

POND: It's come! It's come! In the nick of time.

BILLINGS (*puzzled*): Your Income Tax?

POND: Income Tax? No, no—it's from the Ministry!

TASSELL: Fraphampton?

WHITCHURCH: Devacuation?

POND: Yes, yes! Oh, never again will I speak rudely of the Civil Service! (*Reading excitedly*) "In answer to your communications, dated so-and-so and so-and-so, I am directed to inform you that from Saturday next—that's today—your premises will no longer be shared by St. Swithin's . . ."

[*General murmurs of delight and relief.*]

(*Continuing reading*) " . . . only, but also . . . " (*He looks mystified, turns back and re-reads to get the sense right*) "no longer be shared by St. Swithin's only, but also by another homeless institution—the Meadowvale Academy for Backward Boys and Forward Girls, whose two hundred and fifty pupils will be arriving on the tenth inst." (*Looking up, gasping*) That's this inst.!

[*All stand dumbfounded. Miss Gossage dashes in agitatedly at french windows.*]

GOSSAGE (*breathlessly*): Miss Whitchurch! There's

oodles and oodles of buses coming in—full of screaming children—

POND (*frantically*): No, no—they can't—they mustn't—

WHITCHURCH: They will, if we don't stop them!

TASSELL: Then what are we waiting for?

WHITCHURCH: Come on, then—bolt the doors, bar the windows! Barricade them!

[*Miss Whitchurch and Miss Gossage dash to the french windows to shut and bolt them. Tassell rushes to do likewise at front door.*]

POND (*as they do this*): I'm going to ring the Ministry—

BILLINGS: Closed till Monday. (*He subsides into one of the armchairs.*)

POND (*desperately*): The Cabinet, then! . . . I don't know . . .

[*He pushes past the Sowters and the Pecks to get to telephone. The Sowters and Pecks look at each other indecisively.*]

MR. SOWTER (*aggressively, to Pecks*): Well, don't stand there—lend a hand, can't you?

[*He leads the way to centre table. Mrs. Sowter and the Pecks follow. They start to push table towards french windows, shouting instructions to each other. Pond is speaking inaudibly on the telephone. Tassell turns from the bolted front door as Rainbow enters from school, labouring under the weight of a tuck-box on his shoulder and dragging a trunk.*]

[*Tassell grabs the tuck-box and dashes with it into the common-room.*]

RAINBOW (*indignantly*): Here, what's the idea?

[*He follows him in, with trunk.*]

[The Sowters and Pecks are just getting the table against the french windows, nearly squashing Miss Whitchurch and Miss Gossage, who just manage to extricate themselves. Tassell dumps tuck box on to table, to make a barricade, waving to Rainbow to do the same with trunk.]

TASSELL (*to Rainbow*): On there—and bring down twenty more!

RAINBOW (*outraged*): What?

POND (*into telephone*): Hullo, hullo . . . (*Plaintively*) Oh, do give me trunks!

RAINBOW: Trunks! Blimey! (*He drops trunk.*)

[Sowter and Peck promptly pick it up and whisk it on to table, on which they, Miss Gossage, Miss Whitchurch, Tassell and Mrs. Sowter are starting to stack wooden chairs, other items of furniture, everything they can lay their hands on. Mrs. Peck is largely ineffectual, dithering with ornaments, trying to save them as the furniture is whisked away. The front door bell starts to ring.]

TASSELL (*shouting at Rainbow as he passes*): Don't answer that!

RAINBOW (*shouting back, rebelliously*): I wasn't going to!

[Tassell dashes past Rainbow, and grabs the table from which Pond is phoning; Mrs. Peck just manages to save the bottom half of the instrument. At the same moment Joyce enters, agitated, from school, pulls up in astonishment. Tassell sees her. With an air of sudden decision he dumps the telephone table into Rainbow's arms, crosses to Joyce and confronts her. With obvious determination he asks her a question we can't hear, because of the general uproar. Joyce smiles, nods, clearly says "Yes". He takes her in his arms. Billings, from his armchair, surveys the scene. The front door bell is going almost continuously now, and

the knocker is being plied. Everyone is dashing, stacking, and calling instructions. Hopcroft and Barbara have appeared and are bringing more trunks and tuck-boxes down the stairs. Rainbow is standing with the table still in his arms, muttering oaths. Pond is frantically jiggling the telephone as Mrs. Peck holds the receiver and Miss Whitchurch, having fetched a confiscated air-gun from the study, is manning the barricade with it. Tassell and Joyce are in an embrace, oblivious of everything.

Billings's armchair is the only piece of furniture left in its place in the room. He leans back in it and spreads his hand, palm downwards, over his face, to blot out the scene, as the curtain falls.

Curtain.]

THE MISER

*Freely adapted from
Molière's L'Avare by
MILES MALLESON*

*This comedy—pre-eminently
great, sublimely tragic.*

GOETHE

The following was the cast of *The Miser* at the first performance of its Arts Council tour, given at the Spa Theatre, Whitby, on January 17, 1949:

VALÈRE	-	-	-	-	<i>John Horsley</i>
ÉLISE	-	-	-	-	<i>Gillian Webb</i>
CLÉANTE	-	-	-	-	<i>Norman Cull</i>
HARPAGON	-	-	-	-	<i>Alexander Archdale</i>
LA FLECHE	-	-	-	-	<i>James Ottaway</i>
OLD MASTER SIMON	-	-	-	-	<i>Leo McKern</i>
FROSINE	-	-	-	-	<i>Peggy Thorpe-Bates</i>
JACQUES	-	-	-	-	<i>Frederick Bennett</i>
MARIANE	-	-	-	-	<i>Irene Ash</i>
JUSTICE OF THE PEACE	-	-	-	-	<i>Tristram Butt</i>
SEIGNEUR ANSELM	-	-	-	-	<i>Cecil Winter</i>
FIRST SERVANT	-	-	-	-	<i>Adam O'Riordan</i>
SECOND SERVANT	-	-	-	-	<i>Peter Davey</i>

The play produced by Tyrone Guthrie.

Scenery and costumes designed by Frederick Crooke.

All enquiries regarding performance of this play must be made to the author, Miles Malleon, c/o Paul Elek Publishers, 38 Hatton Garden, London, E.C.1.

Characters

VALÈRE *In love with Elise*

ÉLISE *Daughter to Harpagon*

CLÉANTE *Son to Harpagon*

HARPAGON *The Miser*

LA FLECHE *Servant to Cléante*

OLD MASTER SIMON *A scheming moneylender*

FROSINE *A scheming woman*

JACQUES *Harpagon's cook and coachman combined*

MARIANE *In love with Cléante*

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

SEIGNEUR ANSELM

FIRST SERVANT

SECOND SERVANT

*The action of the play takes place in the house of
Monsieur Harpagon in Paris in the year 1668.*

Note by Miles Malleston

On this first professional production* of my version of Molière's *L'Avare*, perhaps I might say a word as to how it came into being.

It began with a Christmas present—an edition of Molière, with the French on one side of the stage and a more or less literal translation opposite. I read *The Miser*, and thought what a pity that the literal translation made it impossible for our theatre today. I tried re-writing a few scenes, making the dialogue easier to speak, and then worked over it again, and once again—each time getting less literal but, as I hope, more actable. Until finally my attempt has been—not to make a literal translation, far from it—but to “translate” the play, to carry it across from the French stage of nearly three hundred years ago to the English stage of today.

* This note was in the programmes used on the Arts Council tour.

ACT ONE

The lights in the auditorium darken; the footlights throw their exciting rim of light on to the base of the curtain.

A specially written overture starts.

It is quite short, and in a few moments, the curtain slides up . . .

A room in Monsieur Harpagon's house in Paris; in 1668.

Elise, old Harpagon's beautiful daughter, a girl in her early twenties, is seated, and, beside her, Valère is clasping her hand, and gazing into her eyes . . .

For a few moments after the rising curtain has discovered them, the music continues . . .

Not till it has faded, exquisitely, into nothingness, do either of them move.

Then, in the silence, Elise turns from him, and heaves a most tremendous sigh.

VALÈRE: My darling! My Beautiful!! My love!!!—*Elise!!!!*—what a sigh! And at this moment! When you've made me the happiest man in the whole wide world—Why do you sigh? And so deeply!

ÉLISE: I sigh, Valère, when I think of my father! How angry he'll be. Demented! There'll be paroxysms of rage! I dare not imagine what he'll say or do. And my Family! How they'll disapprove. And the world! The World, too, will censure me. When I think of these things, I sigh. But I sigh *deeply* when I remember you'll not always love me as you do now.

VALÈRE: That's true enough!

ÉLISE: Valère!!

VALÈRE: I shall love you more. And more, and more! Oh my dear, suspect me of anything you will, believe me capable of any crime—but not of that. Not of failing you. Never, never, never of failing you.

ÉLISE: All men say such things!

VALÈRE: It's what we do that matters. You must believe me.

ÉLISE: I believe you. How easily we are persuaded by a lover! But I believe; you'll love me always, and will be faithful to me. And if I were told that would be a miracle, I would reply: I still believe in miracles! So I'll not sigh—deeply. I'll just sigh!

VALÈRE: But why sigh at all?

ÉLISE: My dear, if only others knew you, as I know you. When I think of all you've done for me: Given up everything; forsaken your country, your home, your fortune, your parents—to take service in my father's house.

VALÈRE: I left my country, true; but it can hardly be said I *left* my parents. I *lost* them!

ÉLISE: Still no news?

VALÈRE: . . . Well—

ÉLISE: Valère! News?—Good? Bad?

VALÈRE: Neither. Perhaps not even news; an old friend, who knew them well, and to whom I've given the charge of continuing the search, has sent me word. A hint—no more—that they may be yet alive.

ÉLISE: But, my dear, why didn't you tell me?

VALÈRE: I've been wondering—

ÉLISE: Yes?

VALÈRE: Whether I ought not to—to go myself, and follow up this hint.

ÉLISE: And leave me.

VALÈRE: For the time being.

ÉLISE: Oh my dear! . . . Valère, this friend—you can trust him?

VALÈRE: Absolutely.

ÉLISE: He can do everything that you could do?

VALÈRE: Yes.

ÉLISE: Don't go. Not till you have further word. If you were to leave my father's service now, he'd never take you back. And then how could I be with you? Oh, stay here, close to me—and do your best to win my father's love.

VALÈRE: To win your father's love?

ÉLISE: Yes.

VALÈRE: Impossible!

ÉLISE: But why?

VALÈRE: He has no love to win. No love for anything or anybody, but his Moneybags. Forgive me, I have no right to speak to you, so, of your father.

ÉLISE: But it's true. Only too horribly, ridiculously true—but how highly he thinks of *you*.

VALÈRE: And how easily his good opinion has been won! Oh yes, I'm learning quite a lot, in this rather unusual situation of mine—I'm learning that if you want a man to think well of you, all you have to do is to make him believe that you think as he thinks; feel as he feels; like what he likes. Especially, you have to applaud his stupidities and follies, praise his short-comings; and, above all, flatter. Flatter, flatter, flatter. At every turn, in every way, and all the time. You can't overdo flattery. ~~The~~ more outrageous it is, the more they like it. ~~The~~ most cunning, the most suspicious are deceived by it. There's nothing so inappropriate, so far-fetched, that they won't swallow, with a dose of flattery. Of course, one's own honesty may suffer somewhat; but, even so, I flatter myself that the fault lies with the flattered, not the flatterer!

ÉLISE: But, Valère, my dearest, why don't you seek the love of my brother.

VALÈRE: ~~That's~~ impossible, too.

ÉLISE: Surely not.

VALÈRE: Your brother is so exactly the opposite to your father, in all he says, and does, and is . . . I couldn't manage the two of 'em! But your idea's a good one. Why don't *you* take him into your confidence; and tell him.

ÉLISE: Of us?

VALÈRE: Yes.

ÉLISE: I dare not.

VALÈRE: Here he comes.

ÉLISE: I haven't the courage.

VALÈRE: My dear, *you* would gain his sympathy and I his help. I must go. I have my work to do.

[*He goes.*]

[*From another entrance, Cléante bursts on. He is a year or so younger than his sister. Boyish and impetuous, and just now in a state of great excitement.*]

CLÉANTE: Sister! Thank God, I've found you; and alone. I want to talk to you. I've something to say to you. It's been on the tip of my tongue for days.

ÉLISE: Then why haven't you said it?

CLÉANTE: I dared not. I hadn't the courage!

ÉLISE: Brother!

[*Cléante paces the stage.*]

What is it you have to say?

CLÉANTE: So much, so much, so much. Yet, I can say it in one word: Love. Sister, I'm in love! But before I say another word, I want you to understand that I realise I can go no further in this without the full knowledge and consent of my father.

[*Elise looks at him in amazement; Cléante continues.*]

I'm dependent on him. He gave me life; and therefore, everything. After all, our parents are older than we are! We must always remember that! And,

being older, they're beyond the Clutches of Passion. Theirs is the cool judgment of Reason. In this matter of marriage, our whole future is at stake; obviously, for our own sakes, we should allow them, out of their so much greater experience and wisdom, to choose for us; and abide by their decision, even when it's contrary to our own . . . I'm saying all this to you, sister, to save you the trouble of saying it to me, yourself—because I don't propose to listen to a word of it.

ÉLISE: Brother!

CLÉANTE: No. I've made up my mind. I mean to marry the lady I love; and nothing you can say can alter that.

ÉLISE: Am I, then, so utterly lacking in sympathy?

CLÉANTE: Oh No No No. But you're my sister; untouched by feelings like mine—so cool, so sensible, so full of prudence.

ÉLISE: Oh Cléante! Even the most sensible of us can be imprudent, thank Heaven, at least once in our lives!

CLÉANTE: What d'you mean by *that*?

ÉLISE: No matter! It's *you* I'd hear about. Who is she?

CLÉANTE: Who is she!! Oh, Élise!! (*He is swept up on a rising tide of ecstasy. He paces about. But there is no pose in his behaviour. He is just a very young man hopelessly in love for the first time, and completely uninhibited about it*) Her eyes! Her hair! Her mouth!

ÉLISE: Yes, but—

CLÉANTE: So young! So fresh! So sweet!

ÉLISE: Yes, but—

CLÉANTE: Her voice! Her laugh!

ÉLISE: But—

CLÉANTE: The way she moves! Her grace! Her modesty! Her charm!

ÉLISE: But who is she? Her name!

CLÉANTE: Her name!!!! “Mariane”!—“*Mar-iane*”!!!—and she lives quite close here. With her Mother. They live alone together. Her mother’s an invalid. And Mariane looks after her. And with what loving care! What tenderness! What sympathy! So patient! So long-suffering! So uncomplaining! And they aren’t well off. No. The father’s dead; and now they’ve very little money. Élise, can you imagine anything more maddening: here we are, by far the biggest house in the neighbourhood; everybody knows father’s rolling in money. I long to be able to help—if only to give the mother a few delicacies, and Mariane a few pleasures. But because we’re not allowed a single penny for ourselves, I can’t give Mariane even the slightest token of my affection!

ÉLISE: Poor Cléante!

CLÉANTE: I’m desperate. I’m being driven to the most ridiculous subterfuges to try and borrow money—just to have something to spend on her. But it can’t go on like this. I mean to have it out with him.

ÉLISE: With father?

CLÉANTE: Yes!

ÉLISE: What will you say to him?

CLÉANTE: Tell him of my love; and more, my determination to get married—if he doesn’t agree, if he refuses his consent, I shall—I shall—

ÉLISE: Yes?

CLÉANTE: Do something desperate!

ÉLISE: What?

CLÉANTE: I shall—I shall—leave this house.

ÉLISE: Where will you go?

CLÉANTE (*with a magnificent gesture*): Away! Right away!

ÉLISE: And leave Mariane?

CLÉANTE: No No No. I shall take her with me.

ÉLISE: And what will you live on?

CLÉANTE: There you are! I knew you'd make difficulties.

ÉLISE: Brother! My dear! I'm not *making* difficulties; I'm pointing them out.

CLÉANTE: I don't care, something's got to be done! It's *insufferable*—the way he keeps us both penniless. We have to bargain with the tradesmen for the very clothes on our backs!

MONSIEUR HARPAGON'S VOICE (*Off; shouting*): Don't stand there, gaping—you great oaf!—get along with you!

CLÉANTE: There he is!!

HARPAGON'S VOICE (*Off*): Out of my sight!

CLÉANTE: Who's he shouting at?—My own servant!—Sister, we must join forces against him.

ÉLISE: But not now. I'm in no mood to see him.

CLÉANTE: Nor I.

ÉLISE: Come then—

[*She disappears—followed by Cleante.*]

[*La Fleche, who is Cleante's servant, comes running on—Harpagon following. Harpagon stands in the doorway, shaking his stick at him.*]

HARPAGON: You gallows bird, you!—That's what you are: a Gallows-Bird!

LA FLECHE (*turning away; taking a few steps; and muttering as he goes*): The wicked old skinflint.

HARPAGON (*running up to him*): What's that? What are you muttering; grumbling to yourself! If you've got anything to say, say it. Speak out!

LA FLECHE (*turning round on him*): I want to know what it's all about: What are you turning me out for?

HARPAGON: How dare you bandy words with me. Away with you! Out you go! Out, out, out!

LA FLECHE: Your son told me to wait for him here.

HARPAGON: Then go and wait for him in the street.

Not in my house, I won't have you in the place—not a moment longer. Hanging about all day and never doing a hand's turn; never moving; stock-still—like one of the Door-Posts. Only Door-Posts haven't got eyes. You have. And they follow me about, everywhere. Watching. Trying to see if there's anything you can steal.

LA FLECHE: Steal! A fat chance anybody has to steal anything in this house. Everything under lock and key.

HARPAGON: You're spying on me—that's what you're doing. You know 'I've got things hidden away—

LA FLECHE: Have you?

HARPAGON: What?

LA FLECHE: Got things hidden away.

HARPAGON: I didn't say so.

LA FLECHE: Yes, you did.

HARPAGON: Oh, God forgive me—what am I saying?—*Get out!*—*Come back!*—What are you taking with you?

LA FLECHE: Thoughts!

HARPAGON: What have you got in your hand?

[*La Fleche holds it out, empty.*]

HARPAGON: The other one.

[*La Fleche holds out his other hand.*]

HARPAGON: Your pockets?

LA FLECHE: Come and see for yourself.

[*Harpagon goes up to him; and La Fleche turns all his pockets inside out, all empty.*]

HARPAGON: And your breeches? Look at your breeches! There's enough room in 'em to carry away half my household!

[*He feels down the outside of them.*]

People ought to be hung for wearing such breeches:
LA FLECHE: Have you quite finished?

[*Harpagon has turned away.*]

LA FLECHE (*low*): A plague on all misers!

HARPAGON (*swinging round on him*): What did you say?

LA FLECHE (*out loud*): A plague on all misers!

HARPAGON: And what d'you mean by that?

LA FLECHE: What I said.

HARPAGON: What did you say?

LA FLECHE (*louder*): A plague on all misers!

HARPAGON: And *who* are you talking about?

LA FLECHE: Misers! All Misers! . . . Mean; dried-up; terrified—they deserve all they're frightened of—don't you agree?

HARPAGON: You want a good beating.

LA FLECHE: On no I don't. It's the last thing I want.

HARPAGON (*raising his stick*): You're going to get it.

LA FLECHE: Here's another pocket! You missed it! Want to see what's in it? (*He turns it inside out*) Nothing!

HARPAGON (*taking a few steps away; to himself*): Oh, he's being too clever for me, I know he is. He's deceiving me. (*Running back to him*) Oh my good fellow! My dear good fellow! Be a good chap and give it up!

LA FLECHE: Give what up?

HARPAGON: What you've taken!

LA FLECHE: I tell you I've taken nothing! I've nothing in my hands! Nothing in my pockets! So good-day to you, Master—and a plague on all Misers!

[*He goes.*]

HARPAGON: Thank God *he's* gone! . . . although I don't know! As long as he was here, he couldn't take anything away with him . . . Oh, what a mis-

fortune—having so much money about the place! Happy the man who has all his money invested, and lives on the interest! But what investment's really safe? Of course, I might keep it in a bank. But I don't like banks. Banks aren't what they're said to be. Something happens to a Bank—and then, where's your money? Yet it's so bewildering to find anywhere in the house. There's my Strong Box. But what's a Strong Box? Just bait for thieves. If thieves broke in, it would be the first thing they'd go for! It was a good idea of mine to bury it in the garden—But *was* it? People come and go in the garden and I can't keep an eye on it, all the time—

[Elise and Cléante re-appear, and stand watching him.]

Ten Thousand Crowns! In the Garden! What Misery! Was ever a man tortured by such anxieties—never a moment's peace—

[He turns—and sees his two children.]

Hullo! How long have you been there? Did you hear what I was saying?

ÉLISE: No.

HARPAGON: You must have done.

ÉLISE: Indeed, No.

HARPAGON: You didn't hear me mention the garden?

ÉLISE: No.

HARPAGON: Nor Ten Thousand Crowns?

CLÉANTE: Ten Thousand Crowns!!

HARPAGON: I didn't mean a word of it—not a word! I mean—I—I was just thinking aloud: how good it would be if I had Ten Thousand Crowns—in the bank, in the garden—anywhere!

ÉLISE: Father, Cléante and I want to speak to you—

HARPAGON: And don't you run away with the idea I meant anything else.

ÉLISE: Father!

HARPAGON: I could do with Ten Thousand Crowns!

CLÉANTE: But father, everyone knows you have ten thousand crowns—

HARPAGON: Ah! What a wretch I am—when my own children betray me!

CLÉANTE: Betray you! What's wrong with saying you have ten thousand crowns when everybody knows you have ten thousand crowns—ten times over!

HARPAGON: Aah!! You'll be the death of me; one of these fine days—before I know where I am—I shall find myself, here, in my own house, slit from top to toe—because you will go about telling people I'm made of money—

ÉLISE: Father!

HARPAGON: Anyhow, even if it doesn't come to that, you'll be the ruin of me!

CLÉANTE: The ruin of you! How?

HARPAGON: Well, look at you. Just look at you. Your clothes! Look at 'em! All these Fiddle-Faddles! Frills and Furbelows and Fancy Knots—and all these Bows. D'you want all that lot to keep your breeches up? There's a Pretty Penny there! And you've more underneath.

CLÉANTE: Of course!

HARPAGON: And as costly and expensive as what I can see I'll be bound—right thro' to your skin! Why, God bless my soul, if you were all added up as you stand there, I could buy quite a decent annuity with you—~~I~~ I never gave you the money for this get-up.

CLÉANTE: Indeed you didn't.

HARPAGON: Then you've been robbing me.

CLÉANTE: No.

HARPAGON: You must have been.

CLÉANTE: I've been playing.

HARPAGON: *Gambling?*

CLÉANTE: And lucky—winning, and spending it on clothes.

HARPAGON: If you've been winning money, you ought to put it away for a rainy day.

ÉLISE: Father! Cléante and I—have something to say to you.

HARPAGON: And I've something to say to you . . . Well, what is it? (*He turns to Cléante*) What have you to say? What's on your mind?

CLÉANTE: Well . . . it's . . . I . . . You see—

HARPAGON: Come along; out with it!

ÉLISE (*to her brother's rescue*): Father, we want to talk to you about marriage.

HARPAGON: Marriage!! That's Funny! Very Funny!!!

ÉLISE: Why?

HARPAGON: That's exactly what I want to talk to you about.

ÉLISE: About marriage!!—Oh!!!

HARPAGON: What's that? Eh?—Why the "Oh"? Frightened of the subject. A great girl like you! At your age! You ought to be more than ready for it! Then why the "oh"—Eh?

[*Elise can find no answer.*]

CLÉANTE (*to his sister's rescue*): I suppose we're both a little frightened that your ideas about marriage, and ours, mightn't be quite the same.

HARPAGON: When I've told you what I have in mind, you'll have nothing to complain of—either of you. Now—to start with—d'you happen to have heard of a family, that have only recently moved into the neighbourhood; two of 'em—Mother and Daughter?

[*Brother and sister are struck dumb. It is Elise who finds her voice first.*]

ÉLISE: Yes, father.

HARPAGON: Oh! You've heard of 'em!—When?
ÉLISE: . . . someone told me of her—of *them*—only today.

HARPAGON (*he turns on Cléante*): And you—have you heard of 'em?

CLÉANTE: Yes, father.

HARPAGON: Only today?

CLÉANTE: No, father. I heard of them—some time ago.

HARPAGON: Have you *seen* 'em?

CLÉANTE: Yes, father.

HARPAGON: You don't *know* 'em?

CLÉANTE: Yes, father!

HARPAGON: You *know* 'em! Well! This is very interesting!—what do you think of her?

CLÉANTE: The Mother?

HARPAGON: No—the Daughter.

CLÉANTE: What do I think of the daughter!!

HARPAGON: Yes.

CLÉANTE (*cautious, at first*): Well—I think—she's very charming.

HARPAGON: "Very charming"—Yes—And her looks?

CLÉANTE: I think she's very pretty.

HARPAGON: "Very pretty"—she's the kind of girl you'd look twice at, eh?

CLÉANTE (*warming to it*): Oh yes. Indeed.

HARPAGON: And her manner?

CLÉANTE: It becomes her.

HARPAGON: "Charming"; "very pretty"; and "her manner becomes her." Think she's a good housewife?

CLÉANTE: But of course. Look at the way she does everything for her mother.

HARPAGON: That's true enough. In fact, if you had her for a wife, you'd think you were a very lucky fellow, eh?

CLÉANTE: Yes, I would.

HARPAGON: She's no money.

CLÉANTE: Oh father, with True Love—what's money matter!

HARPAGON: Well, I wouldn't go so far as that! But there *are* other ways of dealing with that side of it.

CLÉANTE: Oh father!!!

HARPAGON: Well, I must say, this is all very satisfactory. I'm glad you think so well of her. And that being so, I—I propose to marry her.

CLÉANTE: You! You propose to marry her!

HARPAGON: Yes.

CLÉANTE: But—who to?

HARPAGON: I said I propose to marry her.

CLÉANTE: You!—But which?

HARPAGON: How which, which what?

CLÉANTE: The Mother or the Daughter?

HARPAGON: Which d'you think?

CLÉANTE: The Mother.

HARPAGON: Then you're a bigger fool than I took you for!

CLÉANTE: But you *can't*!

HARPAGON: And why not, pray?

CLÉANTE: Because—

ÉLISE (*breaking in, to stop him*): Cléante—

HARPAGON: What's the matter with the boy?

ÉLISE: I fear he's not well! Cléante, dear brother, you're ill!

CLÉANTE: Faint! Very faint!

HARPAGON: Faint! Then run along into the kitchen, and get yourself a glass of cold water—nothing stronger, mind!

ÉLISE: And lie down for a little. We can talk of this later.

CLÉANTE: Yes—Yes. (*And he stumbles off.*)

HARPAGON (*looking after him*): Lie down, indeed! Faint! I don't know what they're coming to. Over-dressed! No stamina! All their strength goes into their Fiddle-Faddle— (*He turns back to his*

daughter) Well, now, you know my plans: to marry again—I can't have you two hanging about the place; so we must get you both married too. I have a rich widow for your brother—a great stroke of luck; and for you—the good Seigneur Anselm.

ÉLISE: Seigneur Anselm!

HARPAGON: Seigneur Anselm.

ÉLISE: I'm obliged to you!

HARPAGON: Don't mention it!

ÉLISE (*with a little curtsey*): But, saving your presence, my dear father—I don't wish to marry him.

HARPAGON (*with a little bow*): And, saving your presence, my dear daughter, I wish that you should.

ÉLISE (*another curtsey*): And begging your pardon, my very dear father, I don't mean to marry him.

HARPAGON (*another bow*): And, begging your pardon, my very dear daughter, I'm determined that you shall . . . My dear girl, the good Seigneur is a wonderful match—

ÉLISE: He's old.

HARPAGON: Old! How old d'you think he is. He's on the right side of fifty.

ÉLISE: He's nearer sixty.

HARPAGON: That's what I mean. You don't want to marry a young jackanapes, like your brother. Always lying down, and feeling faint. You want a man in the prime of life. And he's kind, and cultured, and immensely rich.

ÉLISE: I share your regard for him—

HARPAGON: Very well then—

ÉLISE: But I'll not marry him.

HARPAGON: Oh, yes you will. (*And then, he suddenly blows up, and screams at her*) You will, you will, you will. And this evening!

ÉLISE (*bracing herself to his sudden change*): This evening!

HARPAGON: This very evening!

ÉLISE: I'll not.

HARPAGON: You will.

ÉLISE: No.

HARPAGON: Yes.

ÉLISE: You'd force me?

HARPAGON: I'll force you.

ÉLISE: I'd die rather.

HARPAGON: Very well then, die!

ÉLISE: And not marry him!

HARPAGON: Aah!! The Impudence of it! The Wickedness! The Folly!—Any other girl would jump at him!

ÉLISE: Ask any other girl.

HARPAGON: Ask anybody.

ÉLISE: Here comes your new steward. Ask him!

HARPAGON: Ah now, Valère's a good fellow, a sensible fellow. I've no doubt what *he'd* say.

ÉLISE: Nor have I.

HARPAGON: You mean you think he'd agree with *you*.

ÉLISE: I'm sure of it.

HARPAGON: You don't know what you're talking about.

ÉLISE: Father, if Monsieur Valère agrees with you; and thinks I should be obedient, and marry the man you've chosen for me—then I'll acknowledge my impudence, ask your forgiveness, and marry Seigneur Anselm this very evening.

HARPAGON: Well, well, well—

[*Valère appears.*]

HARPAGON: Valère, come here . . . My daughter and I are having a little disagreement—a little dispute—we want you to tell us which of us is in the right.

VALÈRE: But, my dear Monsieur, there can be no doubt!

HARPAGON: What d'you mean by that?

VALÈRE (*turning on the flattery*): Monsieur!—The profound depths of your mature knowledge and

great wisdom, against the shallows of her youth and inexperience—

HARPAGON: Good. Very good—there you are, what did I tell you? He agrees with me.

ÉLISE: But he hasn't heard what we're talking about.

HARPAGON: No. But he thinks I'm right.

ÉLISE: Please tell him. Monsieur Valère, please listen to what my father has to say.

VALÈRE (*with a bow to her*): At your service— (*and a bow to him*) and yours, Monsieur.

HARPAGON: Well, the fact is—you know the good Seigneur Anselm—

VALÈRE: The old gentleman who lives in the big house, at the other end of the town—

HARPAGON: Well—yes—he lives in the big house at the other end of the town—a most worthy gentleman.

VALÈRE: So I have heard. Your judgment of him does you credit.

HARPAGON: Well, the good Monsieur Anselm proposed to me, that he should marry my daughter. Of course I accepted. And now the young baggage says No, she won't hear of it!—Did you ever hear anything so outrageous!

VALÈRE (*with a very urgent sincerity*): No, No, Never. I never heard anything so outrageous!

HARPAGON (*overjoyed, to his daughter*): What did I say!

VALÈRE: I can hardly believe my ears!

HARPAGON: He can hardly believe his ears! And he means it. You can hear it in his voice—Don't you?

VALÈRE: I do. I do. Indeed I do.

ÉLISE: I'd hear it from his own lips—does Monsieur Valère really think I should obey you in this, and marry Seigneur Anselm?

HARPAGON: Very well, you shall. Go on, Valère. Tell her. Tell her. Plainly. In your own words.

ÉLISE: Yes, Monsieur Valère. Plainly. In your own words. And choose your words with care. For I have promised my father that if you think he is right, I will marry Seigneur Anselm—and *this evening!*

VALÈRE: This evening!!!

HARPAGON: Now, Monsieur Valère. Let's hear you!

VALÈRE (*to Elise*): Well . . . of course . . . as I've said . . . there can be no denying that your father must be right.

HARPAGON: There you are!

VALÈRE (*to Harpagon*): Yet . . . at the same time . . . it might be said . . . in a kind of way . . . that your daughter is right, too.

HARPAGON: My daughter right, too! We can't *both* be right. Don't be a dam' fool.

VALÈRE: Well—she might, perhaps, say that you were going a little fast.

HARPAGON: Eh?

VALÈRE: Too fast for *her*. *Your* Vision being so much finer and quicker in perception than hers, she has not, as yet, that *certainty* that makes for unhesitating assent. Whereas, given a little more *time*—

HARPAGON: Impossible. No time to spare. There's something about the offer that makes it unique. If he takes her at once, he takes her without a dowry.

VALÈRE: Without a dowry!

HARPAGON: I thought that'd take you by surprise. I thought that 'ud take the wind out of your sails! Without a dowry.

VALÈRE: Why then . . . I must say . . .

HARPAGON: Without a dowry. You see, there's nothing more to be said!

VALÈRE: Nothing! Altho' she might perhaps say that marriage being a life-long affair, and her whole happiness or unhappiness for the rest of her life depending on it—and taking into consideration the great disparity in their ages—

HARPAGON: Yes, Yes, Yes. But I don't think you can have heard. If he takes her at once, he takes her without a dowry.

VALÈRE: Yes of course—that's unanswerable.

HARPAGON: Right as usual, my dear Valère—unanswerable.

VALÈRE: Though, of course, she might answer that there might be *some* fathers who would consider their daughter's happiness rather than what they could save on them; who would shrink from sacrificing them to a bank balance; who might even desire for them all the deep joy, the inner content, the peace of mind that only a successful marriage can bring—

HARPAGON: Yes, but—

VALÈRE: But it must be a Marriage of Love. Love—that unfolds and grows through the years, like a great tree; with its roots so deep that all the winds of misfortune may blow upon it, and only give it new vigour.

HARPAGON: Yes, yes, yes. That's all very well. I know all that. But he's in a hurry. And we must make use of that. He wants immediate possession—*(He breaks off)* What's that?

VALÈRE: What's what?

HARPAGON: In the garden—a noise—didn't you hear?

VALÈRE: I heard nothing.

HARPAGON: A dog barked—maybe I imagined it. You didn't hear it?

VALÈRE: No.

HARPAGON *(to Elise)*: Nor you?

ÉLISE: I heard it distinctly.

HARPAGON: I thought so; that means there's someone in the garden. I *won't* have people in the garden. Excuse me. Stay here. I'll be back. *(And he charges off.)*

ÉLISE *(at once)*: Valère, don't you realise, that if you

agree with my father, I shall be married this evening—to someone else.

VALÈRE: If I hadn't agreed with him, I should have been dismissed on the spot. As it is, here I am—to prevent it.

ÉLISE: How?

VALÈRE: We'll escape from this marriage, together—into our own. We'll run away. If your trust in me, and love, are enough.

ÉLISE: Need you ask!

VALÈRE: Then let's thank God this has happened. My dear, my dear. (*He sees Harpagon returning*), my dear young woman, you ought to thank God this has happened. Down on your knee, my girl—and thank God that your future husband is such a man as he is, wanting you so much that he'll not wait a moment longer than he need—Oh pardon, Monsieur, that I should talk to your Daughter in this way. My feelings carried me away.

HARPAGON: Oh go on, go on, my boy. Don't mind me. Say what you like to her. Tell her exactly what you feel. (*To his daughter*) And you—you wouldn't listen to *me*, perhaps you'll listen to *him*.

ÉLISE: Oh I *will*, father. I will. Never shall I forget what Monsieur Valère has just said to me.

HARPAGON: Splendid. Splendid—Well, I have to make the arrangements with the good Seigneur. Valère, I leave her in your charge—

VALÈRE: I may have to be a bit high-handed with her.

HARPAGON: As high-handed as you wish.

VALÈRE: Very well. Now, young lady, into the next room, if you please. And I'll come with you—(*To Harpagon*) She might try to run away.

HARPAGON: Run away!

VALÈRE: Never fear. I'll take care of *that*. I won't let her out of my sight—in you go!

[*Elise goes off, followed by Valère.*]

HARPAGON (*looking after them*): Strange how I've taken to that young fellow! Never argues; never contradicts. Always agrees with me! So right-minded! *Such a comfort—Such a comfort—*

[*And as he trots off in the opposite direction—the stage darkens . . . it becomes light again at once, on an empty stage. But, at once, La Fleche, young Cléante's servant, puts his head stealthily in at one of the entrances and has a cautious look round.*]

[*Young Cléante does exactly the same at an opposite entrance—and sees his man.*]

CLÉANTE (*advancing on to the stage*): Hey! You!—Where have you been? Didn't I tell you to wait for me here?

LA FLECHE: That's right. You did. And I *was* waiting—till your father came. Really, Master, that father of yours! Accused me of stealing; and wanted to beat me. So I didn't wait!

CLÉANTE (*urgently*): How are things going? It's more urgent than ever now. You won't believe it, but since I saw you last, I've discovered my own father is my rival.

LA FLECHE: Your what?

CLÉANTE: My rival.

LA FLECHE: What in?

CLÉANTE: Love.

LA FLECHE: I don't believe it.

CLÉANTE: I told you you wouldn't, but it's true.

LA FLECHE: The old scoundrel! What's he want with love? A high rate of interest? . . . He's too old to take *any* interest . . . Did you tell him?

CLÉANTE: What?

LA FLECHE: That you're rivals.

CLÉANTE: Heavens, No. That would only have made matters worse. I nearly gave it away though—it was such a shock—but how are things going? Have you any news for me?

LA FLECHE; Oh, Yes. I've news for you—

CLÉANTE: Well?

LA FLECHE: It's an unkind world, Master, for anyone who wants to borrow money.

CLÉANTE: Why, aren't we going to get it?

LA FLECHE: Oh Yes, we shall get it—that old scamp Simon, who was recommended to us, says he's working day and night for us—that's what he says; and you'll be pleased to hear you've completely captivated him: Such a *charming* young man; such good looks, with such good manners—and a lot more nonsense of that sort.

CLÉANTE: But are we going to get the money?

LA FLECHE: Oh, Yes. We're going to get the money—on conditions.

CLÉANTE: Did you meet the man who's actually lending it?

LA FLECHE: Did I *what*? Oh No. It's not as simple as *that*. These things aren't carried on above-board in that fashion. No. They have to be wrapt in *mystery*. The man who's lending the money takes just as much care as you do to remain unknown. But you're to meet him this afternoon, at somebody else's house, and he's to learn from your own lips your name and security.

CLÉANTE: My father's name; my mother's Will. Security's all right. Nothing to worry about there.

LA FLECHE: No. Nothing to worry about there.

CLÉANTE: Then what *are* we worrying about?

LA FLECHE: . . . here are the Conditions, which, I gather, our mysterious benefactor dictated, himself, to Master Simon—to be shown to you, before we go any further.

CLÉANTE: Read them.

LA FLECHE (*reading; but not too easily*): "Provided always that the Lender is satisfied with the Security—"

CLÉANTE: He will be. Nothing wrong about that.

LA FLECHE: No. Nothing wrong with that.

CLÉANTE: Go on.

LA FLECHE: "Then a Good and Exact Bond shall be drawn up by an Accredited Notary."

CLÉANTE: That's reasonable. Nothing to be said against that.

LA FLECHE: No. Nothing to be said against that.

CLÉANTE: Go on.

LA FLECHE: "In order not to burden his conscience."

CLÉANTE: His *what*?

LA FLECHE: Conscience. "The Lender does not intend to charge more than five and a half per cent.—"

CLÉANTE: Five and a half! But *that's generous*. There's nothing to complain of in *that*!

LA FLECHE: No. There's nothing to complain of in that.

CLÉANTE: Well—?

LA FLECHE: "But, in consideration of the fact that the said Lender has not, for the time being, in hand the said sum in question, and in consideration of the fact that the said Lender is therefore compelled to borrow the said sum from another source, and at the rate of twenty per cent., it is hereby agreed that the said First Borrower shall pay this interest in full and without prejudice to the rest, since it is only to oblige the said Borrower that the said Lender has himself to borrow the money."

CLÉANTE: God in heaven, that makes over twenty-five per cent.! What Arab, what Jew, what Turk, is this?

LA FLECHE: No Master, just French!

CLÉANTE: Twenty-five and a half per cent.! But what can I do? I must have the money.

LA FLECHE: That's what I told 'em. Shall I go on?

CLÉANTE: Is there more?

LA FLECHE: Oh Yes, there's more . . . "Of the fifteen thousand francs asked, the Lender can only pay down half the amount."

CLÉANTE: What's this? Only half—what about the other seven thousand odd?

LA FLECHE: "In lieu of the remaining seven thousand five hundred, the said Borrower is requested to take various Goods and Chattels, as per the accompanying memorandum. Item: A Four Poster Bed, with three posts and an Antique Commode to match."

CLÉANTE: Antique commode—!

LA FLECHE: "Item: A Large Walnut Dining Table, with five well-turned legs—the sixth unfortunately missing—"

CLÉANTE: What am I to do with it?

LA FLECHE: "Item: Three Old-Fashioned Muskets guaranteed quite harmless, but most picturesque, with three forks for them to stand on."

CLÉANTE: Muskets!

LA FLECHE: But "quite harmless"—"~~Item: A Brick~~ Furnace, with two Retorts, very handy for those who make a hobby of Distilling."

CLÉANTE: I ask you!

LA FLECHE: "Item: A Lute from Bologna, with all its strings—or nearly all. Item: a Draught Board and the Game of Goose, very useful for passing the time when one has nothing better to do—"

CLÉANTE: Stop! ~~That's enough—!~~

LA FLECHE: There's ^{only} one more: "A Lizard Skin, stuffed with hay, over three feet long, a delightful curio for hanging on a wall—all the above-mentioned reduced by the good-will of the said Lender to seven thousand, five hundred francs."

CLÉANTE: May his good-will choke him! It's *Robbery*! I'd like to get my hand on him. I'd wring his neck. The damned thief! Somebody's coming—give me that list.

[*He withdraws, followed by La Fleche. . . . Harpagon enters, with Master Simon, who is talking as they appear.*]

SIMON: A young man, Monsieur Harpagon, badly in need of money, and who will agree to any terms that you care to impose.

HARPAGON: Wants money badly eh? That's good. But the risk, Master Simon. Any risk?

SIMON: He was very highly recommended.

HARPAGON: His Family?

SIMON: I've no doubt a very good one.

HARPAGON: Yes. But is it good for the money? If the father's rich, what's the boy want money for? Doesn't sound right to me.

SIMON: His servant assures me you'll be satisfied on every point when you meet him.

HARPAGON: But, so far, you don't know the name or the circumstances of this young client of yours.

SIMON: That you shall hear from his own lips. But I *do* know that the Family's immensely rich; the Mother's dead; and the Father very old and decrepit; indeed, the young man's more or less given his word that he'll follow his poor dear wife before very long.

HARPAGON: Good. That's something. Well, if the poor young man's really in need of money, it behoves us to do what we can to help, eh, Master Simon? After all, there's great pleasure—in helping the needy.

[*Cléante and La Fleche reappear.*]

SIMON (*giving Harpagon a document*): Your part of the agreement.

HARPAGON (*seizing it*): Ah! (*And he begins, eagerly, to study it.*)

LA FLECHE: Hullo! What's this! Old Simon, here, talking to your father.

CLÉANTE: Someone must have betrayed me! You?

LA FLECHE (*in protest*): Master!

CLÉANTE: He's found out somehow. If he's come

to ask my father's permission, Heaven help us—that's what it must be.

SIMON (*hearing, turning, and seeing them . . . he approaches Cléante*): Well, I never expected to see you here. You're in a great hurry, aren't you? I'm sure I don't know how you found out—

CLÉANTE: Found out?

SIMON: No matter, no matter. I don't see there's any great harm done; and now you *are* here, we can settle the whole business on the spot— (*He starts back towards Harpagon.*)

CLÉANTE: One moment—

SIMON (*reaching Harpagon*): Monsieur Harpagon!

HARPAGON (*looking up from the document he has been examining*): Eh!

SIMON: Allow me to present my young client, of whom I've been telling you . . . and this, my dear young man, is the gentleman who is so generously ready to oblige us.

[*Father and Son stand glaring at one another . . .*]

HARPAGON: . . . *Who* did you say this was!

SIMON: My young client—such a charming young fellow—

HARPAGON: *You!* You're the young rascal in need of money—and trying to borrow it!

CLÉANTE: *You*—the Money Lender!

HARPAGON: And your father old, and decrepit, and about to die!!!

CLÉANTE: Twenty-five and a half per cent., and a lot of worthless junk for seven thousand francs!!!

HARPAGON: And *you* ready to pay it!! That's what I ~~can't~~ get over!! The Folly!! The *Wickedness* of it!! You'd have *ruined* me!! . . . Have you got *no* sense of responsibility? No Moral Principles?

[*In his indignation, he has pushed his face almost into his son's.*]

CLÉANTE: How can you look me in the face!

HARPAGON: Look you in the face! Look you in the face!! I don't *want* to look you in the face!!! Out of my sight!

CLÉANTE: Gladly!

[*He turns on his heels, and makes for the exit:*]

HARPAGON (*shouting after him*): Aren't you ashamed—?

CLÉANTE: Yes. I am.

HARPAGON: I'm glad to hear it.

CLÉANTE: Of you!

[*And he goes . . . Harpagon with an "Aah!" starts to run after him; but stops, and returns to the bewildered Master Simon.*]

HARPAGON: A nice mess you've made of it.

SIMON (*heart-broken*): Monsieur!

HARPAGON: Here's your agreement. (*He tears it in two*) Take it. And never never never accept him as a Client again. Borrowing money! I won't have it in my family. Take care of that—or no more commissions from *me*.

SIMON (*more heart-broken*): Monsieur!

HARPAGON: That's enough! Go away.

SIMON: Monsieur—

HARPAGON: Go away.

SIMON: Monsieur!

[*And, almost in tears, he creeps from the room . . . Harpagon stands looking after him.*]

[*From the entrance that leads to the garden, Frosine, "a scheming woman," looks cautiously into the room; and with a kind of stealth, enters and crosses the room, till she is close behind him. Then*]

FROSINE: Monsieur Harpagon—

HARPAGON (*spinning round*): Hullo!—What are you doing here?

FROSINE: Come to see you.

HARPAGON: Why?

FROSINE: You told me to.

HARPAGON: Did I?

FROSINE: You know you did.

HARPAGON: Oh yes, of course. How did you get here?

FROSINE: Thro' the Garden.

HARPAGON: Who told you to come thro' the garden?

FROSINE: You did. You said, don't come to the front door.

HARPAGON: Oh . . . er . . . How's it looking?

FROSINE: What?

HARPAGON: The garden.

FROSINE: Lovely. Very bright. Very quiet.

HARPAGON: Quiet. Eh? Good . . . Anybody about?

FROSINE: Only the Gardener.

HARPAGON: What's he doing?

FROSINE: Digging.

HARPAGON: What for?

FROSINE: How should *I* know? It's what gardeners do, isn't it?

HARPAGON: Where's he digging?

FROSINE: Among the currant bushes.

HARPAGON: Aaah!!!! . . . (*Over his shoulder, as he makes for the garden*) Wait here . . . Want to see you . . . Back in a moment. (*And he disappears.*)

[*La Fleche, who, since he came on with Cléante, has kept well in the background, approaches Frosine.*]

LA FLECHE: What's he gone for?

FROSINE: After his gardener; and the poor old wretch is half-dead with overwork already.

LA FLECHE (*he still has the "Memorandum" of "Items"*): He's a One! There isn't a single ~~thing~~ ~~on~~ ~~this~~ ~~list~~ anywhere about the house. He ~~must~~ ~~have~~ a whole store-house hidden away somewhere!—What are you up to in these parts?

FROSINE: How can you ask? I tell you, I've never undertaken anything that I haven't carried thro' to a successful conclusion. And match-making is my speciality. I began by a talk with the Mother. I told her how her daughter had caught your eye as you sat at your window, as she passed by in the street; and how, frequently, since, you have driven past their little house, in your carriage, and observed her at her window—and how greatly the girl pleases you; and how you desire her, in marriage.

HARPAGON: And what did she say?

FROSINE: She was overwhelmed at your condescension. And when I told her that you wish her daughter to be present, here, tonight, in your house, on the occasion of your daughter's marriage, she willingly gave her consent.

HARPAGON: Yes—I *have* to give this supper to-night to Seigneur Anselm; can't get out of it; and I thought it would be a good opportunity to have Mariane here—there's always too much to eat on these occasions, and a lot left over.

FROSINE: A generous thought—

HARPAGON: Yes, but, look here—have you talked to the old lady about a dowry, eh? She ought to make some effort to give her daughter *something*. She ought to be ready to bleed herself white for this, oughtn't she? Dammit, a man doesn't take a woman, just for herself, with nothing to go with her. It's *unreasonable*. It isn't *right*. Goes against my conscience. I doubt whether I ought to allow it.

FROSINE: But she will.

HARPAGON: Will what?

FROSINE: Bring you something.

HARPAGON: Bring me what?

FROSINE: Twelve thousand Crowns.

HARPAGON: Twelve thousand Crowns! But this is the first I've heard of it. *What* a girl! What a *sweet*

girl! I can hardly wait!—There's no mistake?

FROSINE: There's no mistake—she eats only Salads.

HARPAGON: Eh!

FROSINE: Occasionally a little cheese, perhaps, and an apple or so.

HARPAGON: What *are* you talking about?

FROSINE: None of your elaborate meals, your costly dishes. No. For years past she's been used to such a sparse diet ~~that they wouldn't be good for her—~~ well, meal by meal, day by day, that mounts up; say eight crowns a day—that's close on three thousand a year.

HARPAGON: Yes, but—

FROSINE: And she's used to very simple clothes; and takes great care of 'em; never buys any new ones. She'll be satisfied with what she's got.

HARPAGON: Ah, but will she? Will she?

FROSINE: A word from me, and she will. I can persuade her. If I were to tell her the simple style—the things she *has*—suit her best; that, with those she caught you, and with those she'll keep you; but that if she dresses up in a whole lot of Silks and Satins and Velvets and Fineries—

HARPAGON: Oh!

FROSINE: Then she'll be just like any other woman of society—one of many in your mind, and she'll lose you—think what that means: another four thousand at least. Seven thousand in all.

HARPAGON: Yes but—

FROSINE: And then she's been very well brought up—she has a real horror of gambling.

HARPAGON: I should hope so—

FROSINE: Yes, but many young women of her age and class nowadays—most of 'em—play regularly and recklessly. I know a girl—not unlike Mariane ~~to look at, same age, same background,~~ lost twenty thousand last year. Twenty thousand! Well, make it a quarter of that. There's another five thousand

for you ; which makes up the twelve thousand—and that's quite a lot of money.

HARPAGON (*momentarily impressed*): Yes, quite a lot. (*Suddenly his voice runs crescendo up the scale of indignation*) God Almighty! What's all this about! Are you mocking me? D'you expect me to give you a receipt for something I haven't had? What d'you take me for?

FROSINE: A wise man.

HARPAGON: Eh!

FROSINE: But you disappoint me!

HARPAGON: Disappoint?

FROSINE: I can understand the ordinary man in the street, an ordinary "Business Man"—even a *good* Business Man—talking like that. But *you*, Monsieur Harpagon—*You!* Who have such an *immense*, almost *Cosmic*, grasp of these things; who can look upon a balance sheet with the eye of a philosopher, who knows the Innermost Meaning, the Ultimate Significance of Debit and Credit, that *you* should fail to realise that by marrying this girl, you're twelve thousand crowns better off than if you married any one else.

HARPAGON: I'd be very much better off, if I didn't marry at all! I know that. And yet I've set my heart on her. You take me for a wise man . . . in your heart of hearts, d'you think I'm an old fool?

FROSINE: Monsieur—!

HARPAGON: Do you?

FROSINE: Monsieur, I should only think you a fool, if you were foolish enough to think so yourself—for that would indeed be folly.

HARPAGON (*he is very upset*): But there *are* those who might think I'm—I'm a bit on the oldish side.

FROSINE: None that matter!

HARPAGON (*refusing to be comforted*): Oh, I don't know!—There's the girl herself—*she* matters, I

suppose, in this, in a way. Won't *she* think I'm too old?

FROSINE: Indeed No.

HARPAGON: Has she seen me?

FROSINE: No.

HARPAGON (*hopelessly*): Well, there you are!

FROSINE: You can put such fears right out of your head. She doesn't *like* young men. She has an unconquerable aversion to them. She has no patience with them. They have no interest in anything, she says, but in themselves. But older men—they have an Understanding of the Past; an Appreciation of the Present; and a Design for the Future—Gifts that only the years can bring. Youth she finds insipid. Age excites her; by its very maturity. Only a few weeks ago, she was contracted to be married—

HARPAGON: Was she? (*Alarmed.*)

FROSINE: But on the very day of the marriage, she broke it off when the Bridegroom was able to sign the Covenants without spectacles. A nose without spectacles, she said, had little appeal for her.

HARPAGON (*doubtfully*): It all sounds a little unusual.

FROSINE: She's an unusual girl. She has, in her room, a few—but very beautiful—engravings. And of whom? Of Adonis? Of Apollo? Of the youthful and god-like Paris? No! But of the aged Priam, King of Troy; of Nestor, ancient sage of Greece; of blind Homer; and the bearded Sophocles. So, you see, you have nothing to fear. Especially, as I've told you, I've never seen you looking so young.

HARPAGON: Not too young?

FROSINE: No, no, no, just right. Let's have a look at you.

[*Harpagon, beginning to perk up again, poses for her.*]

Take a few steps.

[*He does so.*]

FROSINE: What poise! What ease!

[*Encouraged, Harpagon does a little skip—which finds him short of breath and brings on a fit of coughing.*]

HARPAGON (*trying to recover his breath, wheezing and panting*): . . . Yes . . . there's nothing much wrong with me—except this cough.

FROSINE: Oh, but Monsieur, that only completes the picture—you cough so gracefully!

HARPAGON: Well, I must say—it all sounds very satisfactory and I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you.

FROSINE: Don't mention it. To have had the privilege of being able to render you so great a service, has made me very happy.

HARPAGON: And I'm sure I'm very happy to have been able to afford (*he shies at the word, and adds*)—to afford you such happiness. (*He glances at the door, contemplating escape; she notices the glance.*)

FROSINE: And now, Monsieur—!

HARPAGON (*producing a great fob watch; looking at it, and exclaiming*): Goodness gracious me! How time flies! I'd no idea it was so late. I must be getting along. (*He starts towards the door; she gets in his way.*)

FROSINE: Monsieur, d'you understand? I've striven so hard in your service, that the young woman you desire is all eagerness to meet you.

HARPAGON: I'm delighted to hear it. I'm sure I owe you a great deal.

FROSINE: Ah, you *do*, Monsieur! You *do*! On your behalf, I've devoted all my time, all my energies; yes, and all my money—and God knows, I'd little enough of that.

HARPAGON: Dear, dear, dear! Such devotion! Such a capacity for helping others! Really, I almost envy you—sorry I can't stay—a little matter of business—

[*Again he starts towards the door; again she hinders him.*]

FROSINE: Monsieur, for these last few weeks, I've more or less *lived* at their house. I've had to find excuses for going there so continuously. I took them little presents. A succession of presents; and not such little ones. No. On several occasions, I took them out for a drive; or to dinner, or to the play. Monsieur, I've spared neither myself, nor anything that I own.

HARPAGON: And I've told you: I'm most grateful. I don't know how to thank you.

FROSINE: It's not your thanks I want!

HARPAGON: Indeed! Oh well, of course, if you don't *want* to be thanked—there's no more to be said! . . . "A little matter of business" did I say? A Most Important Matter! Several Important Matters—!!

[*And, dodging round her, he makes for the door; but she catches hold of his coat tails.*]

FROSINE: Monsieur, you must listen! I've so filled her ears with your Virtues, with your Uprightness, with your Good Faith, with your Honour, with your *Generosity*—

HARPAGON: Yes, that's all very well—but I'm afraid you may have *overdone* it a bit.

FROSINE (*suddenly raising her voice to a shrill scream*): "Overdone it." "Overdone it!" Yes I have. (*She is, of course, "putting on an act," to soften Harpagon's heart and loosen his purse-strings*) Not for you. No. But for myself. Yes . . . There you are—with your bride-to-be so eager that she can hardly wait for the marriage to be fulfilled—and here am I . . . I—who have brought this about—without a sou left in the world—not a sou! (*She throws herself to her knees before him*) Oh, Monsieur, can you accept such great happiness at these hands, and see the owner of them starve?

HARPAGON (*looking down at her, embarrassed and hesitating*): Er . . . well, of course . . . looked at like that . . . I *do* realise . . . there's no doubt . . . I'm . . . I'm very much in your debt . . . (*His hand dives into his pocket, he produces a purse; and takes out a handful of money*) . . . Yes . . . very much . . . Good Heavens! I never paid the Gardener! I've only just enough here. (*He makes for the door.*)

[*And he bolts from the room.*]

FROSINE (*scrambling to her feet; shaking her fist after him; and sounding very matter-of-fact after her attempt at "play-acting"*) Become of you! . . . May your body shrink to the size of your Soul, and sizzle on the floors of hell!

[*She turns towards the opposite exit.*]

Now to fetch Mariane. I don't envy her her first sight of him! But I do envy her his fortune—and when *that's* hers, I'll get my share of it . . .

[*And, as she makes her way to the exit, the stage darkens.*]

[*End of Act I.*]

ACT TWO

An empty stage; but, no sooner has the curtain risen, than Monsieur Harpagon comes running on, calling as he comes:

HARPAGON: Master Jacques! Master Jacques!

JACQUES (*popping his head in, from another entrance*): Monsieur?

HARPAGON: Those two good-for-nothings about?

JACQUES: Waiting for you.

HARPAGON: Fetch 'em in.

[Jacques's head disappears . . . and two slovenly-looking servants make their appearance.]

HARPAGON: Now then, come along. Come on in. I want to give you your orders for the evening.

[The two servants advance into the room. Jacques reappears.]

HARPAGON: You two have to look after the drinks; hand the glasses round. But don't go running at people every time you see an empty glass, or think they look thirsty. No, let 'em ask. And don't hear the first time. Let 'em ask again; keep on asking. *(To Jacques)* That rascally son of mine, and his sister—d'you know where they are?

JACQUES: Shall I fetch them, Monsieur?

HARPAGON: Yes. And Monsieur Valère. Ask him if he'd be kind enough to step this way.

JACQUES: Yes, Monsieur.

[He goes off.]

FIRST SERVANT: Shall we serve in our aprons, Master; or without?

HARPAGON: I don't know. Let's have a look. Take 'em off.

[The two servants take off their aprons.]

HARPAGON: Yes. That's better. Serve like that. Take care not to soil your liveries.

SECOND SERVANT: Soil 'em, Master! Look here. There's a great black stain all down the front o'mine. Lamp oil. Been there for years. Can't get it off.

FIRST SERVANT: And I've got a large hole in me breeches; behind. Saving your presence, they can see my—

HARPAGON: Hold your tongue . . . Oh yes, so they can! Well, you'll have to keep your back-side to the wall, that's all. (*To the other*) And you can walk about in the middle of the room, with your tray in front of you. So. (*He shows him*) Hide the stain. And keep a bucket of water handy. When a bottle's half empty, fill it up.

[*Cléante comes into the room.*]

Hullo, you young blackguard. There you are. Now, listen: if you want me to forgive this last escapade of yours, when the young woman I'm going to marry comes to this house for the first time, be careful how you behave yourself.

CLÉANTE: Careful, father? Behave myself? What d'you mean?

HARPAGON: What I say! (*To Valère*) Ah, there you are, Valère. Good of you to come!

[*Jacques re-enters.*]

CLÉANTE: But, father, why shouldn't I behave myself?

HARPAGON: How should I know! Don't ask me. But when a man re-marries, his children are usually very unpleasant about it. And I won't have it. No sour looks! Give her a welcome. Look as if you were pleased to see her.

CLÉANTE: I can't say, father, that I'm overjoyed she's to be my step-mother; but, that I shall be pleased to see her—I can promise you that.

HARPAGON: Well, mind you are! That's all. Make yourself scarce. I'm busy. (*Cléante makes off. Harpagon turns to Jacques*) Now, Master Jacques, your orders; and I've left you to the last. . . .

JACQUES: One moment, Monsieur. Are you speaking to your Cook, or your Coachman; for I'm both.

HARPAGON: I know that.

JACQUES: And which are you speaking to?

HARPAGON: I'm speaking to *you*.

JACQUES: Yes, Monsieur; but I should like to do this properly. Do you speak to me as Cook or Coachman?

HARPAGON: Cook.

JACQUES: Very good, Monsieur.

[*And he runs off; as Harpagon turns to Valère.*]

HARPAGON: Now, Valère; I shall want your advice, if you'd be so good . . . Master Jacques . . . Hullo, where is he? . . . Where's he gone to?

[*Jacques re-appears; with a large white Chef's cap on, and tying on a white apron.*]

HARPAGON: What's all this?

JACQUES: Your Cook, Monsieur—awaiting orders.

HARPAGON: Well—I'm giving Supper to some friends.

JACQUES: I've heard so. I could hardly believe my ears.

HARPAGON: Can you give us something good to eat?

JACQUES: I can, I can; indeed I can. Only give me the money to buy—

HARPAGON: Money, money, money!! Why will everybody talk to me about money? That's what it always comes to! The only word in their mouths, the only thought in their heads.

JACQUES: Oh, but Monsieur!—My dear good Master, that's not *fair*! Not *just*. If you want me to cook you a dinner, I must have the food to cook. And to get the food, I have to buy it; and to buy it, I must have money. Stands to reason. Doesn't it, Master Steward?

VALÈRE: No, Master Jacques; it does *not*. Anybody can produce plenty of food with plenty of money. It takes the Great Cook, the Real Artist, to make a banquet out of nothing.

JACQUES: Nothing!

VALÈRE: Well, practically nothing!

HARPAGON: Oh Valère, Valère—what Wisdom! Invaluable! Such a grip of *Essentials*!

JACQUES (*to Valère*): Oh well, if you know how to make a dinner without anything to cook, you do it yourself.

HARPAGON: Don't be silly. Now, what shall we want?

JACQUES: Ask *him*! *He's* the Magician in *this* house.

HARPAGON: Hold your tongue. Answer me. What shall we want?

JACQUES (*grudging*): How many are there to be?

HARPAGON: Ten. But have enough for eight. If there's enough for eight, there's enough for ten.

VALÈRE: How true.

JACQUES: Well—we must begin with a Tureen of Soup.

HARPAGON: That's all right. Thick, filling soup—plenty of beans in it.

JACQUES: A good rich soup.

HARPAGON: Yes. No. Not rich.

JACQUES: And then, a Roast.

HARPAGON (*in horror*): A Roast!

JACQUES (*warming to it*): And then some Pies. Delicious Game Pies.

HARPAGON: Pies!

JACQUES: And various Cheeses; and Fruits.

HARPAGON: Cheeses and Fruits!

JACQUES: And several unusual dishes on the Side.

HARPAGON: No, no, no. (*To Valère*) Stop him. You must deal with this. This man'll cook me to death.

VALÈRE: Good Master Jacques, you must realise that Monsieur Harpagon, out of the goodness of his heart, has asked his friends here to *enjoy* themselves. The first requisite of Enjoyment is good health. And the greatest menace to good health is over-eating. Any doctor will tell you that. To invite people to sit down to a table over-laden with a

plethora of food is little better than murder. The act of a Culinary Assassin. Never, good Master Jacques, never must you forget the old saying: "We must eat to live; not live to eat."

HARPAGON: Oh beautiful, beautiful! What was it? —"Eat to live; not live to eat." I'll have that engraved over my dining-room in letters of gold—well, that look like gold.

VALÈRE: There's no need for you to worry yourself about your Supper Party, Monsieur Harpagon. I'll see to all that.

HARPAGON: Good. Very good—now, about getting the girl here. Do you think I ought to send the carriage for her?

JACQUES: Excuse me, Monsieur.

HARPAGON: *What* is it?

JACQUES: You wish to talk to your Coachman.

HARPAGON: About the carriage—

JACQUES: One moment, Monsieur. (*He starts to run off.*)

HARPAGON: Here! Hi! (*But Jacques has gone*) What's the matter with the fellow? (*To Valère*) What d'you think? Send the carriage? Might be a good thing—just for once.

[*Jacques runs back—wearing a Coachman's old battered top hat, and with a long whip.*]

JACQUES: About the carriage?

HARPAGON: I want you to get it out, give it a clean.

JACQUES: Delighted.

HARPAGON: And the horses—

JACQUES: Impossible.

HARPAGON: Why?

JACQUES: Not fit to go out.

HARPAGON: Why shouldn't they be fit? What's wrong with 'em? They never do any work.

JACQUES: They never get anything to eat. I know—with us, humans—the less you do, the more you

eat; but, with the poor beasts, they'd rather do more work and get more food. They get nothing. Except what I give 'em, myself; out of my own mouth, as you might say. I'm *fond* of 'em. I love 'em. They're my best friends. It's hard to see your best friends starve.

VALÈRE (*to Harpagon*): In any case, Monsieur, we shall want him in the kitchen. It's not far. I'll drive them myself.

JACQUES: Very good. And I'd sooner they died under *your* hand than mine.

VALÈRE: Master Jacques, you're a trouble-maker.

JACQUES: Master Steward, you are a Busy-Body.

HARPAGON: Be quiet!

JACQUES: I won't!

HARPAGON: You answer me back?

JACQUES: I do!

HARPAGON: You dare!

JACQUES: I dare!

HARPAGON: Monstrous!

JACQUES: For your own sake—

HARPAGON: Eh!

JACQUES: You know, really, Monsieur, I'm quite fond of you. God knows why; but I am. After the horse, I like you better than anyone. And—(*pointing to Valère*)—if you only knew the *truth*, about *him*.

VALÈRE (*taken by surprise*): What's this?

JACQUES: How you're being deceived.

HARPAGON: Deceived?

JACQUES: That's what I said.

VALÈRE: Master Jacques, be careful!

JACQUES: I won't be careful. I've done with being careful. I'm going to tell the truth.

VALÈRE: Get back to your kitchen.

JACQUES: Ah, you see. He's afraid. He knows I know

HARPAGON: Know *what*?

JACQUES: The truth.

VALÈRE: Monsieur, is this necessary?

HARPAGON: Let him go on!

JACQUES: Master!—that man there! Your new steward!—whom you engaged only the other day; and already trust more than I've ever known you trust anyone; and treat better, too—do you know what he is? He's . . . He's nothing more than a Common Flatterer—that's all he is. *I* know. *I* can see thro' him. And I know if *I* could do as he does, lie and flatter and fawn, I should probably get double the wages and half the work. But I *can't*. No. I *like* the truth I've a kind of *feeling* for it, if you know what I mean. I always tell it . . . and Master, oh my *dear* Master, when I hear the *lies* that he tells you—that you're good, and wise, and generous—not a word of truth in it—it breaks my heart. If you only knew what people really say about you.

HARPAGON: And what do people really say about me?

JACQUES: They say . . . No. You'd be terribly angry if I told you.

HARPAGON: I shall be terribly angry if you don't.

VALÈRE: Monsieur, you won't listen to this impertinence.

JACQUES (*turning fiercely on Valère*): And don't *you* come butting in—filling his ears with your dishonesty. Have you *no* respect for him? You know, as well as I do, he's known as the greatest scallywag in the town; the meanest old skinflint in all France. A thief; a usurer—Wow!! (*Harpagon has given him a crack across the shins with his stick.*)

HARPAGON: Usurer, eh? (*Another crack.*)

JACQUES: Wow!

HARPAGON: A thief!

JACQUES: Wow!

HARPAGON: A skinflint!

JACQUES: Wow!

HARPAGON: Double wages and half the work, eh? From to-day, you get half wages and double the work. And next time you tell me the truth, out you go! Who's that? Someone in the garden . . .

[*He runs to where he can see out.*]

It's that rascally man of my rascally son. What's he doing? Hi! You! Come away from those Currant Bushes. (*And he runs off.*)

VALÈRE (*laughing at Jacques*): Oh, good Master Jacques, I'm afraid, once again, your devotion to truth hasn't done you a great deal of good.

JACQUES (*rubbing his shins, and furious*): What right have you to laugh at me, eh? Laugh when you get a beating yourself; not when somebody else does.

VALÈRE (*contrite*): Oh no, please, please. Don't be angry. After all, the love of truth is a fine thing. And, to speak truly, you're the better man of the two.

JACQUES (*limping away; muttering to himself as he goes*): Polite, eh? I believe he's frightened of me! If I bully, he'll cringe—that 'ud make me feel a lot better! (*He turns round on Valère; limp forgotten; and swaggers back, raising his voice, with a great show of bluster*). Now, Master Busy Body. Master Know-all. Master New Broom. None of your silly flattery with *me*—or it'll be the worse for you!

VALÈRE: But no, Master Jacques. I mean it. I repeat. I respect you. I admire you.

JACQUES: So! You persist! You "respect me", do you? you "admire me"! Another word of that sort—and you get the biggest hiding of your life.

[*And he pushes Valère, suddenly and violently, in the chest. Valère, surprised, gives way. And Jacques continues to drive Valère right across the stage, in a series of pushes, as he talks.*]

I'm sick of you! (*Push*). Find something to do

(*Push*). Paid more than any of us (*push*) and do less (*push*)—It's time you were taught a lesson.

[*And, imitating Harpagon, he whacks him across the shins with the butt end of the whip he is carrying.*]

VALÈRE (*seizing the whip out of his hand*): That's enough. You go too far. You forget yourself. After all, you're only a Cook.

JACQUES (*cringing at once*): True enough, true enough—Only a Cook . . . and a Coachman—don't forget that.

VALÈRE: *And a fool! A great fool.*

[*And he gives Jacques a push; who falls back just as he had done.*]

You have a passion for truth, eh? (*Push*). But no reverence for it (*push*). You babble it (*push*). You blurt it out (*push*).

[*He has now forced Jacques back again across the stage; and is near an exit. He crosses Jacques, and goes to the exit. There he turns, and hands back the whip that he had taken from him; saying:*]

And it's time you were taught a lesson: There are times, Master Jacques, when the truth is too sacred to be told. (*He goes.*)

JACQUES (*looking after him*): Very good, Master Steward. I've done with the truth. Done with it. But not with you—oh no, not with you!

[*As he stands, looking after Valère, Frosine enters with Mariane.*]

FROSINE: Is the old boy about?

JACQUES: In the garden.

FROSINE: Be a good soul, and tell him I'm here, with his lady-love.

JACQUES: His *what*?

FROSINE: You heard. Get alone with you.

[*Jacques, after a searching stare at Mariane, hurries into the garden.*]

MARIANE: Oh, Frosine. I'm so miserable. How I dread this meeting!

FROSINE: Oh come now, my dear, it's not as bad as that.

MARIANE: I know, now, what it must have been like to be led to the rack. The first sight of it! And everybody around, eager to see one stretched in agony.

FROSINE: Well, of course, if you put it like that, old Harpagon isn't exactly the death I should choose. But look me in the eyes, girl; this sudden distress isn't so much because of the old man, but of the young one you've just told me about.

MARIANE: I can't deny it. I can't. Oh, Frosine, if you were bringing me to *his* house. If it were *he* who was to be my husband.

FROSINE: And you've no idea who he is?

MARIANE: No idea.

FROSINE: How often has he been to see you?

MARIANE: Not often enough.

FROSINE: Did he bring presents? Expensive ones?

MARIANE: No.

FROSINE: None?

MARIANE: None.

FROSINE: Then he's probably as poor as a Church Mouse. If you married him, he'd give you a baby; and that's about all you'd get out of *him*! But this old one—he'll die.

MARIANE: But I don't want him to die.

FROSINE: He's got to. It's in the Contract.

MARIANE: In the Contract?

FROSINE: Not in so many words, in black and white. But between the lines. Written, my dear, by the finger of Time in invisible ink! And he'll leave you his fortune, and that *is* in the contract, and—here he comes!

MARIANE: God help me!

[*Harpagon comes running on, wearing a great pair of spectacles.*]

HARPAGON: Ah, my dear, my dear. I'm afraid I must ask you, to excuse these spectacles. But the truth is, I'm not as young as I was. I'm beginning to find these things useful—especially for signing contracts.

[*Mariane is gazing at him, in horror. Harpagon continues, embarrassed by her stare.*]

Of course I know there's no need to wear spectacles to observe your beauty. No. But, on the other hand, one *does* wear them to look at the Sun. Yes . . . He he he (*he laughs*).

[*Mariane tries to find an answer; but turns away to Frosine in silent, mute appeal.*]

HARPAGON (*to Frosine*): What's the matter with her? Why doesn't she answer? She doesn't seem pleased to see me.

FROSINE: Shy. She's shy—A young girl hesitates to show her deepest feelings.

HARPAGON: That's true.

[*Elise appears; and Cléante. Cléante remains in the background.*]

HARPAGON (*to Mariane*): Ah, my love, here's my daughter. Come to pay her respects . . . (*to Élise*). Come along, child . . . Élise, this is Mariane. Mariane, this is Élise.

[*The two girls exchange little curtseys.*]

MARIANE: How d'you do?

ÉLISE: How d'you do?

MARIANE: I have to ask your pardon. I should have paid this visit before.

ÉLISE: On the contrary, it is I who am remiss. If I had known sooner—

[*The two young girls eye one another, curiously.*]

HARPAGON (*to Mariane*): Tall, isn't she? Quite a big girl! But rank weeds grow apace. He he he (*and he laughs again*).

MARIANE (*turning again to Frosine*): Horrible! Detestable creature!

HARPAGON (*to Frosine*): What's she say?

FROSINE: She thinks you're wonderful.

HARPAGON (*to Mariane*): My dear, I'm overwhelmed by your opinion of me—ah, there's my son. Come along, my boy, come along—(*Out of the corner of his mouth*) Remember what I told you. (*Out loud*)—Mariane, my love—this is my son, Cléante. Cléante, my boy, this is Mariane.

[*The two young people stare at one another, agape and aghast. Then:*]

MARIANE (*with a little cry*): Frosine!

FROSINE; What is it?

MARIANE: It's he!

FROSINE: Who?

MARIANE: He!

FROSINE: No?

MARIANE: Yes!

FROSINE: My God!

HARPAGON: What's this?

FROSINE: Nothing!

HARPAGON: Nothing?

FROSINE: She's a little upset.

HARPAGON: What about?

FROSINE: Your son.

HARPAGON: My son!

FROSINE: His size; ~~that~~ he's so grown-up.

HARPAGON: Oh, that's it, is it? Of course. Yes. I understand. My grown-up children. (*To Mariane*) But that's nothing to worry about, my dear. All the

easier to get rid of. (*To Cléante*) Now, my boy—Give her your welcome. Let's hear you tell her you're pleased to see her. Come on, out with it.

CLÉANTE: What can I say? How can I speak to her . . . Father, may I call her Mariane?

HARPAGON (*to Mariane*): May he call you Mariane?

MARIANE: With all my heart.

CLÉANTE: "Mariane" . . . Mar-i-ane! It doesn't need my father's bidding for me to tell you I'm pleased to see you. "Pleased" is too small a word. This whole house, this room, has changed since you entered it. There are moments in our lives that live for ever. This is such a moment. For me, you will always be standing there, as you stand there now—a loveliness, unfading, as long as I have memory to contain it.

HARPAGON: No bad; not so bad. A bit flowery, perhaps—but not so bad.

CLÉANTE: But the thought of being your step-son, of having *you* for a step-mother, is not to be borne. Unendurable! Too horrible for words! An outrage!

HARPAGON: What's this? The Rascal!

MARIANE: No, Monsieur. Let *me* answer him. Young man, please understand this: I feel as you do! Exactly the same. Just as strongly. And, after hearing what you had to say, to have you for a step-son, to be your step-mother, would indeed be unendurable—not to be borne.

HARPAGON: Good, good, good! I like a young woman of spirit. (*To Cléante*) You got as good as you gave. Now—say you're sorry.

MARIANE: No. Please. I'm glad he spoke as he did. I'm deeply grateful. Now I know where I am with him.

HARPAGON: We'll make him change his tune.

CLÉANTE: Never! I shall never change.

HARPAGON: I give you just one more chance. Now then!

CLÉANTE: Very well, father. I'll change my tune. I'll say this: If I were in your place, I should consider I had found the perfect wife. I should want no further pleasure than to please *her*; I should see no beauty in the world but hers; to call myself her husband would be the greatest honour I could covet, and to be a good one, the proudest of careers. I should want no riches, except to see that *she* wanted nothing—counting myself the richest of men, possessing her. Not only *I* would be wholly hers, every thought, every action; but everything I owned, every penny piece.

HARPAGON: Hey, Hey, Hey, that's enough—no good over-doing it. You're getting ridiculous. (*To Mariane*) Now, my dear, would you like to be shown over the house. We're to have a little supper, later; I'm sorry we've nothing to offer you just now.

CLÉANTE: Oh, but we have.

HARPAGON: Have what?

CLÉANTE: Something to offer.

HARPAGON: What?

CLÉANTE: It's all set out in the next room.

HARPAGON: In the next room?

CLÉANTE: Yes.

HARPAGON: What's "set out"?

CLÉANTE: Fruits, Sweetmeats, Confections, Cakes, some of the choicest wines money can buy.

HARPAGON: Merciful God!

CLÉANTE: You wanted her to have a real welcome; so I ordered them; and had them put down to your account.

HARPAGON: Put down to—Oh! Oh!—Valère, did you know about this?

VALÈRE: No, Monsieur.

HARPAGON: The young fool! Choice Wine! What's it going to cost. Come with me, quickly—and see what the damage is! (*He runs off, followed by Valère.*)

ÉLISE (*immediately going to Mariane; taking her by the hands; and kissing her on the cheek*). My brother has told me. I'm so happy to meet you; to make your acquaintance; to become friends; and, alas, to tell you how sorry I am!

MARIANE: How kind you are! I hope you'll always be my friend, whatever happens. It will make . . . whatever happens so much easier to bear.

CLÉANTE: "Whatever happens"! But what *is* going to happen? What are we going to *do*?

MARIANE: What *can* we do?

CLÉANTE: We must do *something*!

MARIANE: I'll do anything you ask. Anything you tell me. Tell me what to do. I know you'll ask nothing dishonourable.

CLÉANTE: Oh, if you're going to limit me like that; to restrict me to what's honourable. How can you be so *unreasonable*!

MARIANE: Cléante, dear Cléante—in this, I'm thinking not so much of myself, or even of us, but of my mother. With me, she has practically nothing; without me, nothing at all. It was for *her* sake, I agreed to this marriage.

FROSINE (*approving*): Spoken like a good girl.

CLÉANTE (*turning on her*): You got us into this.

FROSINE: *Me*?

CLÉANTE: Now get us out of it!

FROSINE: I like that! How did I know this was going to happen? Why didn't you tell me?

CLÉANTE: We didn't know ourselves.

FROSINE: Then don't blame *me*.

ÉLISE: But you will help them.

FROSINE: If there's anything I can do, I'll do it. Of course. I'm not hard. At least, I made myself hard; the good God made me soft—and His work is the better done! When I see true love, I melt; like ice before a flame. So let's think. First of all, young man, if your father gets wind of this—only a sniff

of it—out you go, into the street; *and* without a penny. And what then? Of course, you could starve in each other's arms—there are worse deaths. But, as she says, there's her mother. *She* has only her memories—poor fare, at the best of times. But she's a dear, good soul, her mother. She'd be on your side. Not that she can do anything. No, it's your father, my lad, that's the trouble. (*To Mariane*) He's set his heart on you. And I don't blame him for that; but he's not going to give you up.

ÉLISE: Oh Frosine!

CLÉANTE (*to Mariane*): Oh Mariane!!

MARIANE: Oh Cléante!!!

[*The two lovers move together.*]

FROSINE: Oh' you two!!!! Remember what I told you. If he catches you, goodbye for ever . . . Boy, come away from the girl.

[*Cléante takes a step away from Mariane—but doesn't leave go of her hand. For a moment he stands holding it and gazing at her in adoration—then he bows low over her hand, and kisses it lovingly . . . Harpagon re-appears, with Valère, to watch this.*]

HARPAGON (*to Valère*): Hullo, hullo . . . my son kissing his future step-mother's hand—and she doesn't seem to mind.

VALÈRE: Very praiseworthy.

HARPAGON: Very queer! . . . Anything behind it, d'you think? I must see into it . . . I must be careful!

[*And he trots into the room.*]

Well, well, well—here we are!

[*Cléante drops Mariane's hand, as if he'd been stung; but Harpagon doesn't appear to have noticed anything.*]

(*To Mariane*): Now, my dear—you want to see over the house. Élise, will you do the honours—and Valère, will you go with Élise.

FROSINE (*under her breath to Cléante*): Be very careful. I think he saw.

HARPAGON: And Cléante.

CLÉANTE: Yes, father?

HARPAGON: You stop here. I want to talk to you.

[*Cléante and Frosine exchange a look.*]

HARPAGON: Now than, the rest of you—what are you waiting for? Off you go—And Frosine, you too.

[*The procession moves off—leaving Cléante alone with his father.*]

And now, my boy!

CLÉANTE: Now what, father?

HARPAGON: What d'you think of her?

CLÉANTE (*very cautious*). . . er . . . what do I think of her?

HARPAGON: Yes.

CLÉANTE: . . . of Mariane?

HARPAGON: Of course.

CLÉANTE: er . . . oh . . . So, So!

HARPAGON: Eh? "So so". That's all?

CLÉANTE: Well, to tell the truth, father, frankly, I was disappointed. Her figure is awkward; her prettiness ordinary; and her manner both coy and insipid. Mind you, I wouldn't say a word against her. As step-mothers go, I'd as soon her as anyone.

HARPAGON: But the things you said to her—

CLÉANTE: Oh trifles, my dear father, trifles—thrown off more to please you than her.

HARPAGON: Then she doesn't attract you?

CLÉANTE: Good Heavens, No.

HARPAGON: Not in the least?

CLÉANTE: No. Not in the least.

HARPAGON: A pity. A great pity.

CLÉANTE: A pity, father?

HARPAGON: I'm sorry.

CLÉANTE: Sorry?

HARPAGON: Quite knocks on the head an idea of mine.

CLÉANTE: What idea?

HARPAGON: The fact is, when I saw her here in my house, face to face, I made up my mind to drop the whole thing. But then as I'd offered my hand to the girl, given my word, I couldn't just put her out into the street, could I? No—I thought I'd give her to you.

CLÉANTE: Give her to *me*!!

HARPAGON: Yes.

CLÉANTE: In marriage?

HARPAGON: My dear boy, what d'you think? Yes, of course.

CLÉANTE: Father, my dear father, for *your* sake, and to please *you*, I'll marry her.

HARPAGON: Altho' she's "awkward"; and "ordinary"—and—what was it?—"Coy and insipid"; and she doesn't attract you. No—not in the least!

CLÉANTE: Out of my love for you, I'll make the sacrifice.

HARPAGON: I wouldn't hear of it. No. Out of my love for you, I won't accept. What d'you take me for? Forcing a child of mine against his will—t'isn't in my nature!

CLÉANTE: But, perhaps, father, after we're married, love may come. They say it does happen like that.

HARPAGON: I won't risk it; couldn't have it on my conscience. No. As I say, it's a pity—but I must have her myself.

CLÉANTE: Father, I must open my heart to you.

HARPAGON: Do, my boy, do; that's what I want.

CLÉANTE: I love her. Desperately. Ever since I first

set eyes on her. I want to marry her; more than anything in the world. I was going to ask your consent to our marriage; but, when you told me of your plan, out of my great respect for you, I held my tongue.

HARPAGON: Have you known her for a long time?

CLÉANTE: Not long.

HARPAGON: Have you been to her house?

CLÉANTE; Oh yes.

HARPAGON: Often?

CLÉANTE: Very often; considering what a short time I've known her.

HARPAGON: Have you told her of your feeling for her?

CLÉANTE: Yes.

HARPAGON: Does she return it?

CLÉANTE: I believe she does. But, of course, she didn't know who I was. Just now she was completely taken by surprise.

HARPAGON: I see—(*then, suddenly, his voice runs up the best part of an octave, into a screech*) You young dog! Is there no devilry you're not capable of? A sink of Lies and Deception—that's what you are. God knows where you get it from!

CLÉANTE: "A sink of Deception"! Me!—and you made me tell you by a trick!

HARPAGON: And I won't have you poaching on my preserves!

CLÉANTE: Poaching! It's *you*—trespassing! I was there first.

HARPAGON: There first! You'd never have been there at all, if it hadn't been for *me*!

CLÉANTE: I'll never give her up!

HARPAGON: You deserve such a beating!

CLÉANTE: Just you try!

[*Jacques has reappeared to hear the end of this.*]

JACQUES: Hey, hey, hey—what's this?

[*He runs between father and son—protesting.*]

My dear old Master—my good young Master.

HARPAGON: There's nothing good about him; but he wants a good beating.

JACQUES: Oh No No. Beat me, Master, if it'll do you any good; but not your own flesh and blood.

HARPAGON: If you knew what had happened, you'd agree with me soon enough. You'd condemn him, without another thought. You shall judge! I'll tell you; and you shall be the judge between us.

JACQUES: The judge between you!

CLÉANTE: I agree to that.

JACQUES: As you will, dear Master; as you will—Oh Master Cléante, don't stand there, looking so fierce. A little further off, my good boy—a little further off—if I'm to be the judge—there!—while I listen to what your father has to say.

[*He has taken Cléante by the arm, and coaxed him a few steps away; then, hurries back to Harpagon.*]

HARPAGON (*speaking as Jacques reaches him*): I decide to re-marry; choose the lady; make the arrangements—and, if you please, along comes my son, and informs me he proposes to marry the lady himself.

JACQUES: Oh dear dear dear, No No No—

HARPAGON: Oh dear dear dear, Yes *Yes* YES—And he won't give way. No obedience. No respect. Just Defiance—What d'you think of that?

JACQUES: Shocking. He can't be serious—No, Master Cléante.

[*And he runs over to Cléante.*]

CLÉANTE (*speaking, as Jacques reaches him*): Jacques, in the town, I meet the loveliest young woman you've ever set eyes on. I bow; she smiles; I found out where she lived; I called; I fell in love;

and, miracle of miracles, she loves me. But she and her mother are poor—and now I find my father proposes to buy her, for himself. What d'you think of that?

JACQUES: Oh shocking shocking shocking. He must be joking.

CLÉANTE: A very bad joke!

[And he stalks a few steps further away, leaving Jacques, for the moment, by himself.]

JACQUES: Now what am I to do? There's only one thing I know; the truth's no good.

[He runs back to Harpagon.]

JACQUES: Master, it's all a mistake. He says he doesn't want to marry the lady—if you'll find him someone else he can be happy with.

HARPAGON: If he'll give up Mariane, he can have anyone he chooses. Anyone!

JACQUES: Leave it to me.

[And he runs back to Cléante.]

JACQUES: It's all a mistake. It's the way you behave makes him so angry. He'll let you marry the lady you love, if you'll only show him more respect.

CLÉANTE: If he'll give me Mariane, my respect for him will be unbounded.

JACQUES: Leave it to me.

[Back he runs to Harpagon.]

It's all arranged.

HARPAGON *(turning towards Cléante)*: Thank God for that!

JACQUES *(running back to Cléante)*: it's all fixed up.

CLÉANTE *(turning towards Harpagon)*: Heaven be praised!

JACQUES *(between the two)*: There, my Masters! You were quarrelling all for the want of a little tact.

forth—Confound it, boy, you might listen when I'm talking to you.

[*He realises that Cléante is staring agape, with eyes that are not focussing on him, but on something behind his back.*]

What is it? What's the matter? What have you seen? What are you staring at? Something in the garden?

[*He whisks round to have a look; but, as he does so, La Fleche moves out of sight.*]

What was it? What did you see? Something unusual? Something unusual in the garden? You must have done.

[*And he rushes off into the garden. Cléante watches him go and takes a few mystified steps after him—La Fleche, still with his load, appears in the other door-way.*]

LA FLECHE (*calling*): Master!

[*Cléante turns towards the voice; and then goes hastily to him.*]

CLÉANTE: Well, what is it? What d'you want?

LA FLECHE (*mysteriously*): Under the Currant Bushes!

CLÉANTE: Currant Bushes? What is all this? What are you talking about? What have you there?

LA FLECHE: Listen!

HARPAGON'S VOICE (*from the garden*): Thieves! Thieves! Thieves! Help! Thieves!

LA FLECHE: Quick, master—Out of his way!

[*As he disappears—followed by Cléante, Harpagon comes rushing in from the garden. He is utterly distraught; and runs madly about the stage.*]

HARPAGON: Thieves! Thieves! Murder! Fire!

I'm lost; I'm finished; I'm done for. I've been robbed—Robbed, robbed, robbed. My money! It's gone! It's not there! Somebody's taken it. Who can have taken it? Who?—Who? Who Who Who Who Who Who Who—(*which develops into the strangest sobbing sound*)—Stolen! Stolen! Somebody's stolen it! Where have they gone? Where are they hiding? Where?

[*And he scuttles from exit to exit.*]

They must be somewhere! Of course they must. Somewhere. Oh, if I could lay my hands on 'em. My hands on 'em. My hands on 'em. . . . Ooooh! Ooooh! Wowh!

What's the matter? What's happening? Something's hurting! Oh look!

[*He has seized one of his wrists by his other hand.*]

I've got hold of myself! I've arrested myself! I don't know where I am. I don't know what I'm doing. I can't believe it. I can't. What I've been fearing—only I didn't really believe it could happen—but it has! Whether I believe it or not—Gone! All gone! Ten thousand crowns! Oh my money! My poor dear money! Where are you now? They've taken you away from me! How lonely you must be! There's nothing left! Nothing! No more meaning in anything! No Joy, no Happiness, no Purpose. My Comfort, my Consolation, my Support—gone. I shall never get over it. Never, Never, Never. I shall die—I'm dying, I'm dead, I'm buried—I don't know what I'm talking about! Steady, steady, steady, I must be calm. I must keep control of myself. I must think. What can I do? That's it—what can I do? Do? Do? Do? Do? *The Police!* Of course. Fetch ~~the~~ Police. They'll investigate. They'll find it. They'll get it back. Everybody in the house must be cross-examined.

Everybody. They must be *made* to confess; and if they wor't, then put to the torture. No favouritism. The whole Household. All the Servants; my own children, my son and my daughter—and me, too, if necessary . . . Now, which of 'em do I suspect? I suspect 'em *all*. As I think of each one, I'm sure they did it.

[*Suddenly he claps his hands over his ears.*]

I can hear 'em laughing! They're laughing at me! Why? Why are they laughing? Because they *all* did it. They've all taken my money. That's it. They've all got a share of it. Laugh, laugh, laugh away. But I'll be revenged. Wait. Wait till I fetch the Police—and the Detectives and the Inspectors and the Superintendents; I'll fetch 'em all—and the Magistrates, and the Justices, and the Judges, and the Hangman—with his gallows. I'll hang 'em all! I'll hang the whole world! And if that doesn't do any good, if that doesn't get my money back—I'll hang myself . . . \

[*And, as he stumbles off, the stage darkens.*]

[*. . . the lights go up again.*]

[*A Justice of the Peace enters, followed by Harpagon.*]

JUSTICE (*talking as he enters*): You can leave it all to me, good Monsieur Harpagon, all to me. No need to get excited. Gracious Goodness Me, No. Heavens above, this isn't the first Robbery I've had to deal with. ~~Indeed, indeed, it isn't.~~ I only wish I had a hundred gold-pieces, for every thief I've caused to be hung.

HARPAGON: And that's what you've to do now: hang the thief. Catch him, and hang him, and quickly. And if you can't, I'll find another Justice who can. Every Justice in the neighbourhood must

concern himself over this. And if, together, they can't get my money back, I'll have justice on the Justices.

JUSTICE: Dear dear dear, irregular. Very irregular. No. We must follow the usual procedure. Now: this missing casket, you speak of—What was in it?

HARPAGON: My money!

JUSTICE: How much?

HARPAGON: Ten Thousand Crowns.

JUSTICE: *Ten* Thousand Crowns!

~~HARPAGON: Ten Thousand.~~

~~JUSTICE: Ten Thousand—~~quite a Robbery.

HARPAGON: That's what I'm telling you! A terrible Robbery. The blackest in the whole history of Mankind. And if it goes unpunished, the most sacred things in Heaven and Earth are sacred and safe no more.

JUSTICE: Um—d'you suspect anyone?

HARPAGON: Yes.

JUSTICE: Good. Who?

HARPAGON: Everybody. You must put the whole town under arrest—and most of the Suburbs.

JUSTICE: Irregular. Very Irregular. No. We must proceed in the usual way, quietly and carefully. First sift the evidence, then collect and confirm the proofs, and then—seize our man.

HARPAGON: I can't wait. Let's seize him first.

[Jacques enters, and talks over his shoulder as he enters.]

JACQUES: First slit his throat. Then hang him from the ceiling; give his feet a good grilling, and soak 'em in boiling water.

HARPAGON (*to the Justice*): D'you hear that! He's got him! He's caught the thief. Jacques has caught the thief.

JACQUES (*seeing, and advancing to, Harpagon*): Oh, Monsieur—such unexpected happenings—you

could never guess—into my arms as it were, out of the blue.

HARPAGON: Who is it?

JACQUES: Who?

HARPAGON: Yes, who?

JACQUES: There's no "who"!

HARPAGON: What then?

JACQUES: Oh, Monsieur, the most divine little sucking pig. I'm having it prepared in a special way of my own.

HARPAGON: Never mind about that now. Never mind. This gentleman wants a word with you.

JACQUES: Is he coming to the Supper?

HARPAGON: He wants to ask you some questions.

JACQUES: Questions?

JUSTICE: Don't be alarmed, my man. Nothing to worry about. No need to be nervous—whatever you've done. I'll get it out of you!

JACQUES: Whatever I've done?

JUSTICE: Yes.

JACQUES: Well, as a matter of fact, it isn't!

JUSTICE: Isn't what?

JACQUES: Done. Not quite. But as soon as it is, you shall have it.

JUSTICE: You must keep nothing back.

JACQUES: No. Indeed No. Why should I? But, if it isn't all you want . . . Well . . . if I hadn't the money, what could I do?

JUSTICE: Oh, so you hadn't the money, eh? What have you done with it?

JACQUES: Done with what?

JUSTICE: The money!

JACQUES: What money?

HARPAGON: The money you stole!

JACQUES: Stole!

HARPAGON: And if you don't give it back, I'll have you hanged.

JUSTICE: No No No, you mustn't say things like

that. You mustn't talk to him in that way. Most irregular. No. I can see by his face, he's honest. ~~We shall get what we want out of him, without having to lock him up.~~ Now, my man, if you want to keep out of prison, all you have to do is to confess. No harm'll come to you, and you'll be suitably rewarded.

JACQUES: Confess!

JUSTICE: A large sum of money has been taken. You're the only man who can know about it. Tell us all.

JACQUES (*taking a few steps away, to himself*): Now what am I to say? Not the truth—even if I knew it. But what a chance to get my own back on that Steward.

HARPAGON: What's he muttering about?

JUSTICE: Let him alone. He's making up his mind to confess. I told you he was an honest man.

JACQUES (*returning to Harpagon*): Dear Master, if you must know, it was your Steward.

HARPAGON: My Steward?

JACQUES: Yes.

HARPAGON: Valère! Monsieur Valère!

JACQUES: Yes.

HARPAGON: The only man I thought I could trust.

JACQUES: That's him. He did it.

JUSTICE: What makes you think so?

JACQUES: Um?—What—What makes me think so?

JUSTICE: Yes.

JACQUES: I think so, because—I think so!

JUSTICE: But you must have your reasons.

JACQUES: Oh Yes, I have my reasons.

HARPAGON: For instance, did you see him hanging round the place where I put it?

JACQUES: Yes, I did—Where did you put it?

HARPAGON: In the garden.

JACQUES: That's right. I saw him hanging about in the garden. Where did you keep it?

HARPAGON: In a casket.

JACQUES: That's right. I saw him with a casket.

JUSTICE: What was it like?

JACQUES: What was what like?

JUSTICE: The Casket. (*To Harpagon*) We'll soon find out whether it was the missing one. (*To Jacques*) Well!!

JACQUES: What was it like?

JUSTICE: Yes.

JACQUES: Well, it was—it was like a casket.

JUSTICE: Of course, of course. But I want details. Its *size*—what about that? Was it large?

JACQUES: Small.

HARPAGON: Mine was large.

JACQUES: Oh—of course it was “large”, if you compare it to a snuff-box. I called it “small”, because I was comparing it to the Town Hall.

HARPAGON: That's true enough. It would be small if you compared it to the Town Hall—it sounds very like mine.

JUSTICE: What colour was it?

JACQUES: Colour!

JUSTICE: Yes.

JACQUES: I'm not very good at colours. It's difficult. (*To Harpagon*) How would you describe its colour?

HARPAGON: Me?

JUSTICE: Don't answer.

JACQUES (*taking a shot*): A kind of—of red.

HARPAGON: Blue.

JACQUES: That's what I mean, a reddish-blue, or, as you might say, a blueish-red.

HARPAGON: That's right, it's mine, there's no doubt. Oh Valère, Valère—who would have thought it. After this, I can believe I'm capable of robbing myself.

JACQUES: Here he comes! Monsieur, if you want the truth, don't tell him what I said.

[*Valère enters.*]

HARPAGON: There he is! The black-hearted scoundrel!

[*Valère stops in surprise.*]

Hi, you! Come here! Here! Come here!

[*Valère advances towards Harpagon, in speechless amazement.*]

(*As Valère reaches him*): Well! What have you to say for yourself?

VALÈRE: Monsieur!

HARPAGON: How dare you call me Monsieur!

VALÈRE: I beg your pardon!

HARPAGON: How dare you beg my pardon. There's only one thing for you to do now;—Confess. Confess!

[*Valère stares at him.*]

Oh, how can you stand there and look one in the face, with the weight of your abominable sin on your conscience. What a betrayal! What treachery! I take you into my household; I trust you above all others; I treat you as one of the family—and this is my reward. This infamous, this utterly unspeakable, theft.

VALÈRE (*quietly*): Monsieur, since, obviously, everything has been discovered, I'll make no attempt to deny it.

JACQUES: My God, I've guessed right!

JUSTICE: What's this? You admit it?

VALÈRE: How can I do otherwise?

HARPAGON: You mean: you don't deny it?

VALÈRE: Why should I? My only regret is that you've found out.

HARPAGON: Your only regret!

VALÈRE: For some days past, I've been meaning to discuss it with you.

HARPAGON: Discuss it!

VALÈRE: But now that you know, I beg you not to be angry.

HARPAGON: Angry! Not to be angry! What d'you expect? D'you expect me to throw my arms around your neck, and kiss you on both cheeks!

VALÈRE: Monsieur Harpagon, that I've done you a great wrong, I admit.

HARPAGON: Oh you do, do you! You go as far as that!

VALÈRE: But, after all, my offence is understandable!

HARPAGON: Understandable! You rob me of the most precious thing in all my house.

VALÈRE: I agree, I agree. Of course, I agree. But it isn't as if your great treasure had fallen into bad hands.

HARPAGON: Bad hands!

VALÈRE: It isn't as if I'd acted in any sense of greed. Or envy; or hatred. No. From the very first moment that I entered your house, and my eyes fell on the object of my desire, I've been actuated only by love.

HARPAGON: Love!—Of my money!

VALÈRE: Oh Monsieur Harpagon—No, No, No. I wouldn't have you think that—not for a moment. Your great wealth, your Riches mean nothing to me. Money! After all, what's money? I don't want a penny of your money—as long as you let me keep what I've got!

HARPAGON: Keep what you've got! (*To the Justice*) Did you hear that?

VALÈRE: And if you'll listen to me, I'm sure I can convince you it's your duty to do so.

HARPAGON: Duty!

VALÈRE: Monsieur, that which I've robbed you of, *you* haven't lost. It's still *yours*. Nor can it ever again be taken from *me*!

HARPAGON: I'm going mad!

VALÈRE (*with deep feeling*): For never, good Monsieur Harpagon, never again, in this life—whatever you may say, whatever you may do, can we be parted! Bound together, as we are, irrevocably, by our mutual oath.

HARPAGON: *He's* mad! The fear of the gallows has driven him out of his senses!

HARPAGON (*with a sudden rush of fury, he raises his voice to a shout*): What have you done with what you've taken?

VALÈRE: Done, Monsieur?

JUSTICE (*shouting too*): Still in the house?

VALÈRE: Why yes, of course.

HARPAGON: Intact?

VALÈRE: Monsieur?

HARPAGON: You haven't *tampered*, in any way?

VALÈRE: Monsieur, you insult me! You insult us both! You insult all three of us!

HARPAGON: *Three*?

VALÈRE: You insult me; you insult yourself—and you insult your daughter.

HARPAGON: What, in God's name, has my daughter to do with it?

VALÈRE: I do assure you, Monsieur, from the depths of my soul, she's in no way to blame.

HARPAGON: I should hope not, indeed.

VALÈRE: From the first, she's been Modesty itself. It's taken me all the time since I first came into your house, to gain her consent.

HARPAGON: Her consent? What consent! Her consent to what?

VALÈRE: To the Engagement.

HARPAGON: What engagement?

VALÈRE: *Our* engagement.

HARPAGON: *Ours*? Whose?

VALÈRE: Your daughter's; and mine.

HARPAGON: My daughter; and *you*—an “Engagement”—in marriage?

VALÈRE: What else?

HARPAGON (*with a great cry*): Oh Infamy, Infamy, Infamy!

[*Elise re-appears, with Mariane, and Frosine.*]

HARPAGON (*continuing, without seeing them*): Outrage upon Outrage!

[*He sees Elise.*]

[*And, with another cry, runs to her; seizes her by the wrist, and drags her into the middle of the stage.*]

[*He flings her on to her knees—where she remains.*]

[*The old man is, for the moment, possessed by an uncontrollable passion.*]

HARPAGON: Wretched girl!—Wretched, wretched, wretched!

[*He stoops over her; wriggling his fingers.*]

I can scarce keep my fingers from your throat. I could throttle the life out of you.

VALÈRE: How can you speak so to your own daughter?

HARPAGON: I shall speak as I choose. Give yourself to a servant, and a thief, would you! I’ve only one thing to be thankful for: I’ve found out in time. Four thick walls shall be answerable for you, my girl; till you’re married to the man of my choice. And as for you (*he rounds on Valère*)—you’ll be swinging from a gallows before you’re a day older.

VALÈRE: Monsieur, at least *listen* to me, before we’re thus condemned.

HARPAGON: Listen! *Listen!* I’ve been listening to you for the last five minutes, and I’ve heard enough.

ELISE: Father, I beg you! Don’t abuse your authority over me: in the first flush of your anger. You’ll

look with kindlier eyes on my lover, I know you will, when you learn he's not what you think he is.
HARPAGON: I know that already, thank you! And I'll not hear another word from either of you! (*He swings round on the Justice*): Justice!

JUSTICE: Yes, Monsieur?

HARPAGON: You've been listening?

JUSTICE: Of course, Monsieur.

HARPAGON: You heard this man confess?—on every count?

JUSTICE: Yes, Monsieur.

HARPAGON: Do your duty! 'Arrest him! Take him away!

JUSTICE: Yes, Monsieur.

[*He approaches Valère.*]

VALÈRE (*with tremendous ferocity*): Touch me, at your peril.

JUSTICE (*in terror; to Harpagon*): I must fetch my men. *Run.*

HARPAGON: Stay here. He's getting dangerous.

FROSINE: Here's a To-do! And here comes the old Seigneur Anselm himself—to claim his bride. *Now*—what's to happen?

[*The Seigneur Anselm appears.*]

[*The Seigneur is an up-standing silver-grey-haired elderly man of great distinction. He pauses for a moment in the entrance.*]

HARPAGON (*seeing him*): There's the Seigneur! Seigneur Anselm! Oh, Seigneur Anselm!

ANSELM (*advancing to him*): My dear Harpagon! What is it? What can be the matter? You look distraught! Beside yourself!

HARPAGON: So would you be! See that fellow there!—that one!—with Crime written all over him—he's stolen my money.

VALÈRE: *What's that?*

HARPAGON: And planned to steal my daughter—and that reminds me: of course! What am I thinking about! That concerns *you*—doesn't it—you've come to get married! Yes, of course! He was planning to steal your wife! Well—there he stands, self-confessed. Take your revenge.

ANSELM (*with unruffled dignity. He treats Harpagon with a slightly amused contempt*): My good Harpagon, I assure you I have no intention of marrying any woman against her will; and, in particular, I would not dream of holding your daughter to any arrangement, if her heart is elsewhere. But, for yourself, my dear Harpagon, if you've been wronged, why, to be sure I'll protect your interests, as if they were my own.

HARPAGON: Well said, well said. (*To Valère, indicating Anselm*) The Chief Magistrate of the Town! (*To Anselm, indicating Valère*) You deal with him. Take over his case—and make it as black against him as you can!

VALÈRE (*with a sudden flash of anger*): I must protest!! Why should my affection, my love, for your daughter be called a crime?

HARPAGON: Why! Why! *You*—a rascally servant.

VALÈRE: True, in your eyes, I am a servant; nor can I blame you for that. It was part of my deception.

HARPAGON: Hark at him!

VALÈRE: But I'd have you know, Monsieur Harpagon.

[*A kind of authority is growing in Valère, as he speaks.*]

I'd have you know: that in myself, I am of Gentle, even Noble, birth.

HARPAGON: Rubbish! Stuff-and-Nonsense! Fiddlesticks! D'you expect me to believe *that*? The world's crowded with such Impostors—taking

advantage of being Nobodies to pretend they're Somebody.

VALÈRE (*with a fine indignation*): You wrong me, Monsieur; indeed you do. Never would I make *any* claim to which I hadn't *every* right. I'll go further: there's no living soul throughout the whole great city of Naples, who couldn't bear witness to the truth of what I'm about to tell you!

ANSELM: Naples! Take care, young man! I must warn you: I know Naples—as if it were my own house. I can most easily test the truth of anything you may say.

VALÈRE: You know Naples?

ANSELM: Every stone of it.

VALÈRE: Then you've heard of the Count of Alberti.

ANSELM (*completely taken by surprise*): The Count of Alberti?

VALÈRE: You've heard of him?

ANSELM: Why yes, I've heard of him! Even I might say, in a way, I knew him.

VALÈRE: You *knew* him?

ANSELM: No man better.

[*This time it is Valère's turn to be taken utterly by surprise. For a moment, the two men stare at each other. Harpagon breaks in.*]

HARPAGON: What's all this? What's this to do with it? What do I care for Count What-is-Name? Or any Count? Or anyone else?

ANSELM: Let him alone, good Harpagon, let him alone. Give him rope; and, if he goes on like this, in a few moments, he'll be tied in a thousand knots . . . Well, young man, we're waiting. What more have you to tell us?

VALÈRE: That the Count of Alberti, of whom you've heard; and whom you profess to have known, was my father.

ANSELM: Your father!

VALÈRE: My father.

[*Anselm regards him, for a moment, in utter amazement—then bursts into laughter.*]

ANSELM: Really! 'This is too fantastic! You'll have to think of a better story than that.

[*And he laughs again.*]

VALÈRE (*livid with rage*): I'll trouble you to stop that noise!

[*The laugh dies on the Seigneur's lips, as if he'd been struck.*]

How dare you doubt my words?

ANSELM (*now matching anger with anger*): And how dare such a claim pass your lips? Your impudence, your audacity, are beyond bearing. I suppose you made choice of such a Parent—one of the wealthiest and noblest men of the city—because you knew he'd been dead some twenty years—and cannot be here, himself, to give you the lie.

VALÈRE: Sixteen years ago, he was fleeing from the Revolution in Naples; the ship in which he was making his escape, struck on a rock, and sank.

ANSELM: So! You know that much! Unfortunately for you, I can add to that: his wife, and his two children—his son and daughter; *his only son*—were with him on that ship; and perished with him, on that same night.

VALÈRE (*quietly*): The son was saved. I can remember those moments, as if they were now . . .

[*He pauses for a moment, and seems to look into the distance. All the others are intent on what he is to say.*]

VALÈRE: My father—the most honoured guest on the ship—was with the Captain on his bridge; I had

just said good-night to my little sister; my mother had taken her below to bed; they had just disappeared along the deck. I was standing by the ship's side, gazing down into the passing sea, in charge of a family servant. My hand was in his. Below me, stars danced in the black water, above they filled the sky—the night was very still. Only the lap and swish of the sea, and the slow creaking of the ship . . . then a sudden grinding crash—and I found myself in the sea. I struck out; I felt an arm round me—it was the old servant; he supported me; gained a piece of wreckage; pulled me up beside him; and on it, we drifted till morning. And when the dawn came, there was no sign of the ship, nor of any survivors. But before the next night fell, we were picked up by a boat on its way to Spain . . . only recently, as I was, at length, making my way back to my native city, I saw Élise. From that moment, where she was, was home.

[He moves to her.]

I took service with her father, so as never to leave her side again.

[Mariane moves to him, so that she can speak to him, face to face.]

MARIANE: This old family servant, whom you spoke of, and in whose charge you were—was his name Pedro?

VALÈRE: Why, yes, of course! Old Pedro! . . . But how d'you know? How can you possibly know?

MARIANE: I, and my mother, had hardly reached our cabin, when the ship struck. She seized me up, and was thrown into the sea, clasping me in her arms. Some sailors dragged us on to a raft; for days and nights we were on it; and were rescued by some fishing boats near to the coast of Africa. How often have I heard it from my Mother. My father

on the bridge with the Captain, my brother on the deck with old Pedro.

VALÈRE: Your brother!

ANSELM: Have you any further proof of this strange story, in which you so strangely agree.

VALÈRE (*holding out his hand*): My father's ring. He gave it to Pedro; and, on his death-bed, old Pedro gave it back to me—

[*Anselm bends, for a moment, over Valère's outstretched hand to look at the ring. Then stands upright.*]

ANSELM: The ways of God are mysterious. How well I remember giving that ring to old Pedro!

VALÈRE: You?

ANSELM: I, too, was saved! With the Captain, I found myself in a small boat, but with a company of sailors whose one thought was home. They resisted every command, every entreaty, to remain, even for a moment, on the scene of the wreck. They turned the boat towards home, and their oars dipped and pulled, pulled and dipped, till we beached on the shores of Italy. Caring little whether I lived or died, I returned to Naples; to find my Palace and my Estates untouched; and there I have lived for sixteen years, mourning the loss of my wife and children. I came here, under an assumed name, to start life anew: and here, miracle of miracles, I find the old one—my two children, and my wife. *Jaume*.

HARPAGON: Here, Hi, what's going on? Let me get hold of things—the right end of the stick—are you saying this man is your son?

ANSELM: I am.

HARPAGON: Then I hold you responsible for all the money he's stolen from me!—ten thousand Crowns!

ANSELM: Stolen money—my son!

VALÈRE: What's all this about the stealing of money?

HARPAGON: Well, you told me so yourself!

VALÈRE: *I told you?*

HARPAGON: Yes—so did he. (*Pointing to Jacques.*)

JACQUES: *Me?*

HARPAGON: Yes, you.

VALÈRE (*advancing on Jacques*): You told Monsieur Harpagon that I'd stolen his money! What were you thinking about? What have you to say for yourself?

JACQUES: Nothing! I say nothing! Oh, good Monsieur Valère, it was you yourself taught me that truth was no good; now I've found out for myself that lies are no better; so henceforth, for the rest of my life, I keep silent. I say nothing.

HARPAGON: But this is terrible! If you didn't take my money, who did? I want my money back!

[*Cléante enters.*]

CLÉANTE (*as he comes on*): It's all right, dear father. You've nothing to worry about. I know where it is.

HARPAGON: You know!

CLÉANTE: And all you have to do is to agree to my marrying Mariane and you shall have it back.

HARPAGON: Where is it?

CLÉANTE: Oh, no, no, no! But it's safe! Now, make up your mind! Give me Mariane; or lose your money.

HARPAGON: My Casket! Has it been opened?

CLÉANTE: Yes.

HARPAGON: Oh! Oh, oh, oh! And the ten thousand Crowns gone!

CLÉANTE: No. Not a piece.

HARPAGON: How d'you know?

CLÉANTE: You shall see for yourself, the moment after you say "yes".

MARIANE (*going to Cléante; and putting her hand in his*): But, my dearest, your father's consent is no longer enough. For Heaven, in its great Goodness,

has restored me a father. And now, you must ask *his* consent, too.

ANSELM: And I'm quite sure Heaven hasn't restored you a father, to forbid you to marry the man you love! So come, my dear Harpagon, agree, as I do, to this double marriage—your son to my daughter; and your daughter to my son.

HARPAGON: . . . I haven't got any money to give 'em.

ANSELM: Then it's fortunate I have.

HARPAGON: I shall want a new coat for the wedding—will you buy me a new coat?

ANSELM: With all my heart.

JUSTICE (*suddenly emerging from the background*): And who's going to pay *me*?

HARPAGON: You! What do you want paying for? Hang that fellow (*pointing to Jacques*) for a False Witness, and we'll think about it.

JACQUES: Alas, Alas! Beaten for telling the truth, hanged for telling lies, and my beautiful sucking pig burned to a cinder!

ANSELM: In which case, I propose we all repair to *my* house; where my Chef will provide a Wedding Feast. Let the young couples lead the way—before my Coachman drives away home.

VALÈRE: Élise!

[*And he takes her by the hand, toward the door.*]

CLÉANTE: Mariane!

[*And he does likewise.*]

ANSELM (*to the others*): Follow! You're all invited.

[*And the others follow. Leaving the Seigneur alone with Harpagon.*]

Come along, old Harpagon, come along

[*He goes—and Harpagon is following.*]

[From the opposite entrance, La Fleche staggers on with the box in his arms; he puts it down—the noise of which catches Harpagon's attention, just as he is disappearing. He turns; sees his box, gives a screech that might lift the roof off the house, and rushes back at it . . .]

[La Fleche, thinking the old man is rushing at him, dashes off, like greased lightning; and Harpagon is left, embracing his box.]

HARPAGON: Oh my Own! My Treasure! My Precious! . . . How are you?

[He lifts back the lid.]

Are you all there? Have you been ravaged? . . . No—doesn't look like it . . . But how can I tell? . . . They may have taken some from the bottom Better find out! . . .

[He begins picking out the gold pieces, counting as he does so.]

One—Two—Three.

[He hesitates . . . and looks in the direction in which the others have gone . . .]

The Feast!—I'm hungry!—No!

[And he returns to his box, continuing to pick out the coins and to count.]

Four—Five—Six—

[The curtain comes down, but rises almost at once. Harpagon is surrounded by little piles of gold coins—and getting into a most terrible state as he keeps adding them up wrongly.]

[Curtain.]

THE PARAGON

A play in two acts

by

*ROLAND and MICHAEL
PERTWEE*

The following was the cast of *The Paragon* at the first performance at the Fortune Theatre, London, on May 10, 1948:

DELIVERY MAN	-	-	<i>Tony Thawnton</i>
KATE	-	-	<i>Lola Duncan</i>
JOAN	-	-	<i>Rachel Kempson</i>
JESSICA	-	-	<i>Nan Braunton</i>
THE EARL OF CLANDON	-		<i>Arthur Wontner</i>
SIR ROBERT RAWLEY		-	<i>Walter Fitzgerald</i>
ANGELA	-	-	<i>Elizabeth Kentish</i>
MAXWELL OLIVER	-	-	<i>Anthony Marlowe</i>
THE UNKNOWN MAN		-	<i>Hugh Burden</i>

The Play was directed by Norman Marshall.

It ran for 152 performances.

All enquiries regarding performance of this play must be made to English Theatre Guild Ltd., 75 Berwick Street, London, W.1.

Characters

in order of their appearance

DELIVERY MAN

KATE

JOAN

JESSICA

THE EARL OF CLANDON

SIR ROBERT RAWLEY

ANGELA

MAXWELL OLIVER

THE UNKNOWN MAN

SCENES

*The action throughout occurs in the study of
Sir Robert Rawley's house in the Vale of Avalon.*

ACT I

SCENE 1 *A Spring afternoon.*

SCENE 2 *An hour later.*

ACT II

The action is continuous.

TIME—1946

ACT ONE

Scene 1

6.30, LATE AFTERNOON, IN THE SPRING OF 1946.

The Study of Sir Robert Rawley's house in the Vale of Avalon. The room, which is on the first floor and handsomely furnished, has the dignity of age and overlooks, through two long windows at the back, and over the low balustrade of a balcony, an open rolling countryside, fringed with quiet hills. There is a door up audience left leading to the stairs and front door, and a second smaller door U.R. Above this is a standard lamp and below is a longish table on which is a cigar box, a table lighter, a neat pile of black-edged invitation cards and a table lamp. Between the two long windows is a drinks table with a tray of drinks, glasses, water jug, a box of cigarettes, matches and an ashtray. Robert's high wing chair stands R.C., beside it a small occasional table with a box of cigarettes, a small square ashtray, matches, and a silver-framed photograph of his son Simon. C. is an elbow chair. Between window and door U.L., is a small armchair. D.L. is a couch, behind which is a table with a telephone, table lamp, periodicals and an ashtray. Above the couch is a radiogram. A chandelier hangs from the centre of the ceiling. Being a room in the house of a blind man, the position of the furniture is very precise and is never altered. When anything is inadvertently moved some member of the household automatically restores it to its proper place.

The Curtain rises on an empty stage, then the door U.L. is opened by Kate to allow a Delivery Man to enter carrying a fair-sized crate. Kate, a parlour-maid of the old school, tries, against heavy odds, to apply the early phraseology and traditions of her calling to the present age.

MAN: Where'll you have it?

KATE: On the table over there.

[Kate shuts door. The Man, moving between chairs C., kicks one of them. Kate goes quickly to it, puts it back into position.]

And don't bump into things with those great feet of yours! We don't move furniture in this house, we go round it. Everything must be in its right place or the master will ask why.

MAN: Why?

KATE: Because he's the master.

MAN: One of the pernickity sort, eh?

KATE: No, he's blind.

MAN: Well I never! Can't see, you mean?

KATE: I could hardly have meant anything else, could I? Get along now, I haven't all day to waste.

[Kate moves cigar box and invitation cards to L. of table and takes table lighter to drinks table. Man dumps crate on the floor.]

MAN: There you are.

KATE: Before it's a case of there you are we'll have it out of the crate.

[The Man starts unpacking paper from crate.]

And don't strew the place with bits! I've plenty on my hands without.

MAN: Short staffed, eh?

KATE: Never mind about our arrangements, attend to what you're doing.

MAN *(getting on with it)*: You don't seem too pleased about something.

KATE: What does and doesn't please me is my affair and you may be one of them.

[Puzzled, the Man continues detaching the wrapping and reveals a well-constructed, if rather modern and utilitarian, model of a single-storey sports' building.]

MAN (*regarding it*): Well, I never. What is it, a doll's house?

KATE: Does it look like a doll's house?

MAN: Yes.

KATE: 'Then it isn't. It's a sports' club pavilion as you would see for yourself if you could read.

[*The Man leans forward to read a small brass plate attached to the front of the pavilion.*]

MAN (*reading aloud*): "Erected in proud memory of Second Lieutenant Simon Rawley, only son of Robert Rawley, who fell in action at Caen on the 12th June, 1944. He died but his memory shall live." (*He nods sympathetically*) Only son, eh?

KATE: They wouldn't say so if he was one of a dozen.

MAN: That's right. There was a Rawley played cricket for Warwick.

KATE: That was him.

MAN: A good all-rounder. It was worth what you paid to get in to see him alone. (*He looks at the model again*) Funny idea having it this size. Don't see how anyone'll get much out of it.

[*Kate eyes him with complete scorn.*]

KATE: This is a model of what's being put up on a playing field which will be opened with a ceremony on Monday next.

MAN (*relieved*): Ar! I was going to say.

KATE: You did and what you said was foolishness. Now if you want a cup of tea you'd better hurry before I get too busy with my dinner table.

[*As she speaks she removes a lighter from the side table and puts it on the drinks table. The Man, stooping to pick up a thread of hopsacking, moves the small table by chair. Kate hastens forward, clicking her tongue angrily.*]

Do you want to break his neck? (*She replaces the*

table) The master knows to a hair where everything is.

MAN: Well I never.

[As they go to the door, Joan, Robert Rawley's second wife, and Miss Jessica Streatford, a bleak, elderly lady with spiritualistic tendencies, who, because of her choice of printed linens, looks as if she has been upholstered rather than dressed, come into the room. She carries a cretonne work-bag with a confusion of wool in it. Joan, who is about twenty-six, has a straightforward way of looking at life which is endearing when it isn't embarrassing. She looks at the man interrogatively. He touches his hat.]

KATE: This is the man with the model from London, m'lady.

JOAN: Yes, we saw the van outside. Thank you so much.

MAN: Bin a nice day, hasn't it?

JOAN: Yes, very.

[Kate and the Man go to the door. Jessica gives a little cry on seeing the model and flutters towards it. Kate turns back in the open doorway.]

KATE: While I think of it, m'lady, I've moved the cigar box and invitation cards to the right side of the side table, and put the lighter on the drinks table.

JOAN: I'll tell Sir Robert.

[Kate goes out, closing the door.]

JESSICA: Isn't it splendid! Quite lifelike! Robert will be pleased. It's unlike any other building in the neighbourhood.

JOAN (nodding): Yes, I'm afraid it is!

[She, too, approaches the model and stands looking at it from beneath clouded brows.]

JESSICA: But I still think a nice monument would have been more in keeping.

JOAN: What's the use of a monument—except for birds?

JESSICA: Birds? Oh, *birds*. Yes. But I don't think they mean any disrespect. What I feel is that a sports' club isn't a very religious way of remembering anybody.

JOAN: It isn't supposed to be. Robert wants it to be useful—thank goodness.

JESSICA: I only hope dear Simon will approve. I shall certainly ask him next time he materialises.

JOAN (*patiently*): Do you think the plans for the pavilion will have reached the spirit world yet?

JESSICA (*sitting and fumbling in her work-bag*): Of course. What happens *here* is transmitted *there* with the speed of thought. But what troubles me is that if Simon had liked the idea I'm sure he would have mentioned it before. It would be a dreadful thing if he objected.

[*Joan walks away to the couch, then turns to Jessica, who is winding up the short lengths of wool which have got into a tangle.*]

JOAN: Jessica, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but if by any chance Simon decided to make one of his startling appearances at the opening ceremony, please keep it to yourself. You know how Robert hates it and it would be so disconcerting if people thought you were talking to yourself.

JESSICA: I suppose, as usual, you're trying to say that I imagine these phenomena.

JOAN: I only feel we have worries enough without trying to invoke rather pointless ghosts who never say anything sensible.

JESSICA: That's a very ignorant remark. I remember my poor sister once saying: "There are more things

in my philosophy than you will ever dream of in heaven"—or was it earth?

JOAN (*with a sigh*): It was both—originally.

JESSICA: Last time Simon materialised he said he was very, very happy.

JOAN: If we get our deserts in after life that can't have been true.

JESSICA: I do wish you wouldn't talk that way. Visitors from the other side can be most vindictive when you're rude about them. At one seance I attended a woman who was flippant had a very nasty pinch from her Uncle Sebastian.

JOAN: Simon never reached the pinching age.

JESSICA (*looking before her*): Poor dear boy! I can see him now with his pretty blue cap, scoring a hundred goals.

JOAN (*blinking*): Was this in heaven?

JESSICA: No, dear, at Lords.

JOAN: A hundred goals would justify a memorial if nothing else did.

JESSICA (*reproachfully*): You know, Joan, you're funny about Simon. You never speak of him as if you feel his loss.

JOAN: Why should I? I hardly knew him. To me he was just a scapegrace young man with an extraordinary gift for playing cricket, signing schoolboys' autograph books and laying traps for their pretty sisters.

JESSICA: If poor Sybil could hear you talk like that she would turn in her grave.

JOAN: Why? Don't people learn the truth about each other in the spirit world?

JESSICA: Robert wouldn't like it either. Simon was the apple of his father's eye.

JOAN (*quietly*): And he's been blind half his life.

JESSICA: I sometimes wonder if you're jealous of Robert's affection for Simon because you've had no child of your own.

easier to get rid of. (*To Cléante*) Now, my boy—
Give her your welcome. Let's hear you tell her
you're pleased to see her. Come on, out with it.

CLÉANTE: What can I say? How can I speak to her
. . . Father, may I call her Mariane?

HARPAGON (*to Mariane*): May he call you Mariane?

MARIANE: With all my heart.

CLÉANTE: "Mariane" . . . Mar-i-ane! It doesn't
need my father's bidding for me to tell you I'm
pleased to see you. "Pleased" is too small a word.
This whole house, this room, has changed since you
entered it. There are moments in our lives that live
for ever. This is such a moment. For me, you will
always be standing there, as you stand there now
—a loveliness, unfading, as long as I have memory
to contain it.

HARPAGON: No bad; not so bad. A bit flowery, per-
haps—but not so bad.

CLÉANTE: But the thought of being your step-son,
of having *you* for a step-mother, is not to be borne.
Unendurable! Too horrible for words! An outrage!

HARPAGON: What's this? The Rascal!

MARIANE: No, Monsieur. Let *me* answer him.
Young man, please understand this: I feel as you
do! Exactly the same. Just as strongly. And, after
hearing what you had to say, to have you for a step-
son, to be your step-mother, would indeed be un-
endurable—not to be borne.

HARPAGON: Good, good, good! I like a young
woman of spirit. (*To Cléante*) You got as good as
you gave. Now—say you're sorry.

MARIANE: No. Please. I'm glad he spoke as he did.
I'm deeply grateful. Now I know where I am with
him.

HARPAGON: We'll make him change his tune.

CLÉANTE: Never! I shall never change.

HARPAGON: I give you just one more chance. Now
then!

CLÉANTE: Very well, father. I'll change my tune. I'll say this: If I were in your place, I should consider I had found the perfect wife. I should want no further pleasure than to please *her*; I should see no beauty in the world but hers; to call myself her husband would be the greatest honour I could covet, and to be a good one, the proudest of careers. I should want no riches, except to see that *she* wanted nothing—counting myself the richest of men, possessing her. Not only *I* would be wholly hers, every thought, every action; but everything I owned, every penny piece.

HARPAGON: Hey, Hey, Hey, that's enough—no good over-doing it. You're getting ridiculous. (*To Mariane*) Now, my dear, would you like to be shown over the house. We're to have a little supper, later; I'm sorry we've nothing to offer you just now.

CLÉANTE: Oh, but we have.

HARPAGON: Have what?

CLÉANTE: Something to offer.

HARPAGON: What?

CLÉANTE: It's all set out in the next room.

HARPAGON: In the next room?

CLÉANTE: Yes.

HARPAGON: What's "set out"?

CLÉANTE: Fruits, Sweetmeats, Confections, Cakes, some of the choicest wines money can buy.

HARPAGON: Merciful God!

CLÉANTE: You wanted her to have a real welcome; so I ordered them; and had them put down to your account.

HARPAGON: Put down to—Oh! Oh!—Valère, did you know about this?

VALÈRE: No, Monsieur.

HARPAGON: The young fool! Choice Wine! What's it going to cost. Come with me, quickly—and see what the damage is! (*He runs off, followed by Valère.*)

ÉLISE (*immediately going to Mariane; taking her by the hands; and kissing her on the cheek*). My brother has told me. I'm so happy to meet you; to make your acquaintance; to become friends; and, alas, to tell you how sorry I am!

MARIANE: How kind you are! I hope you'll always be my friend, whatever happens. It will make . . . whatever happens so much easier to bear.

CLÉANTE: "Whatever happens"! But what *is* going to happen? What are we going to *do*?

MARIANE: What *can* we do?

CLÉANTE: We must do *something*!

MARIANE: I'll do anything you ask. Anything you tell me. Tell me what to do. I know you'll ask nothing dishonourable.

CLÉANTE: Oh, if you're going to limit me like that; to restrict me to what's honourable. How can you be so *unreasonable*!

MARIANE: Cléante, dear Cléante—in this, I'm thinking not so much of myself, or even of us, but of my mother. With me, she has practically nothing; without me, nothing at all. It was for *her* sake, I agreed to this marriage.

FROSINE (*approving*): Spoken like a good girl.

CLÉANTE (*turning on her*): You got us into this.

FROSINE: *Me*?

CLÉANTE: Now get us out of it!

FROSINE: I like that! How did I know this was going to happen? Why didn't you tell me?

CLÉANTE: We didn't know ourselves.

FROSINE: Then don't blame *me*.

ÉLISE: But you will help them.

FROSINE: If there's anything I can do, I'll do it. Of course. I'm not hard. At least, I made myself hard; the good God made me soft—and His work is the better done! When I see true love, I melt; like ice before a flame. So let's think. First of all, young man, if your father gets wind of this—only a sniff

of it—out you go, into the street; *and* without a penny. And what then? Of course, you could starve in each other's arms—there are worse deaths. But, as she says, there's her mother. *She* has only her memories—poor fare, at the best of times. But she's a dear, good soul, her mother. She'd be on your side. Not that she can do anything. No, it's your father, my lad, that's the trouble. (*To Mariane*) He's set his heart on you. And I don't blame him for that; but he's not going to give you up.

ÉLISE: Oh Frosine!

CLÉANTE (*to Mariane*): Oh Mariane!!

MARIANE: Oh Cléante!!!

[*The two lovers move together.*]

FROSINE: Oh you two!!!! Remember what I told you. If he catches you, goodbye for ever . . . Boy, come away from the girl.

[*Cléante takes a step away from Mariane—but doesn't leave go of her hand. For a moment he stands holding it and gazing at her in adoration—then he bows low over her hand, and kisses it lovingly . . . Harpagon re-appears, with Valère, to watch this.*]

HARPAGON (*to Valère*): Hullo, hullo . . . my son kissing his future step-mother's hand—and she doesn't seem to mind.

VALÈRE: Very praiseworthy.

HARPAGON: Very queer! . . . Anything behind it, d'you think? I must see into it . . . I must be careful!

[*And he trots into the room.*]

Well, well, well—here we are!

[*Cléante drops Mariane's hand, as if he'd been stung; but Harpagon doesn't appear to have noticed anything.*]

(*To Mariane*): Now, my dear—you want to see over the house. Élise, will you do the honours—and Valère, will you go with Élise.

FROSINE (*under her breath to Cléante*): Be very careful. I think he saw.

HARPAGON: And Cléante.

CLÉANTE: Yes, father?

HARPAGON: You stop here. I want to talk to you.

[*Cléante and Frosine exchange a look.*]

HARPAGON: Now than, the rest of you—what are you waiting for? Off you go—And Frosine, you too.

[*The procession moves off—leaving Cléante alone with his father.*]

And now, my boy!

CLÉANTE: Now what, father?

HARPAGON: What d'you think of her?

CLÉANTE (*very cautious*). . . er . . . what do I think of her?

HARPAGON: Yes.

CLÉANTE: . . . of Mariane?

HARPAGON: Of course.

CLÉANTE: er . . . oh . . . So, So!

HARPAGON: Eh? "So so". That's all?

CLÉANTE: Well, to tell the truth, father, frankly, I was disappointed. Her figure is awkward; her prettiness ordinary; and her manner both coy and insipid. Mind you, I wouldn't say a word against her. As step-mothers go, I'd as soon her as anyone.

HARPAGON: But the things you said to her—

CLÉANTE: Oh trifles, my dear father, trifles—thrown off more to please you than her.

HARPAGON: Then she doesn't attract you?

CLÉANTE: Good Heavens, No.

HARPAGON: Not in the least?

CLÉANTE: No. Not in the least.

HARPAGON: A pity. A great pity.

CLÉANTE: A pity, father?

HARPAGON: I'm sorry.

CLÉANTE: Sorry?

HARPAGON: Quite knocks on the head an idea of mine.

CLÉANTE: What idea?

HARPAGON: The fact is, when I saw her here in my house, face to face, I made up my mind to drop the whole thing. But then as I'd offered my hand to the girl, given my word, I couldn't just put her out into the street, could I? No—I thought I'd give her to you.

CLÉANTE: Give her to *me*!!

HARPAGON: Yes.

CLÉANTE: In marriage?

HARPAGON: My dear boy, what d'you think? Yes, of course.

CLÉANTE: Father, my dear father, for *your* sake, and to please *you*, I'll marry her.

HARPAGON: Altho' she's "awkward"; and "ordinary"—and—what was it?—"Coy and insipid"; and she doesn't attract you. No—not in the least!

CLÉANTE: Out of my love for you, I'll make the sacrifice.

HARPAGON: I wouldn't hear of it. No. Out of my love for you, I won't accept. What d'you take me for? Forcing a child of mine against his will—t'isn't in my nature!

CLÉANTE: But, perhaps, father, after we're married, love may come. They say it does happen like that.

HARPAGON: I won't risk it; couldn't have it on my conscience. No. As I say, it's a pity—but I must have her myself.

CLÉANTE: Father, I must open my heart to you.

HARPAGON: Do, my boy, do; that's what I want.

CLÉANTE: I love her. Desperately. Ever since I first

set eyes on her. I want to marry her; more than anything in the world. I was going to ask your consent to our marriage; but, when you told me of your plan, out of my great respect for you, I held my tongue.

HARPAGON: Have you known her for a long time?

CLÉANTE: Not long.

HARPAGON: Have you been to her house?

CLÉANTE; Oh yes.

HARPAGON: Often?

CLÉANTE: Very often; considering what a short time I've known her.

HARPAGON: Have you told her of your feeling for her?

CLÉANTE: Yes.

HARPAGON: Does she return it?

CLÉANTE: I believe she does. But, of course, she didn't know who I was. Just now she was completely taken by surprise.

HARPAGON: I see—(*then, suddenly, his voice runs up the best part of an octave, into a screech*) You young dog! Is there no devilry you're not capable of? A sink of Lies and Deception—that's what you are. God knows where you get it from!

CLÉANTE: "A sink of Deception"! Me!—and you made me tell you by a trick!

HARPAGON: And I won't have you poaching on my preserves!

CLÉANTE: Poaching! It's *you*—trespassing! I was there first.

HARPAGON: There first! You'd never have been there at all, if it hadn't been for *me*!

CLÉANTE: I'll never give her up!

HARPAGON: You deserve such a beating!

CLÉANTE: Just you try!

[*Jacques has reappeared to hear the end of this.*]

JACQUES: Hey, hey, hey—what's this?

[*He runs between father and son—protesting.*]

My dear old Master—my good young Master.

HARPAGON: There's nothing good about him; but he wants a good beating.

JACQUES: Oh No No. Beat me, Master, if it'll do you any good; but not your own flesh and blood.

HARPAGON: If you knew what had happened, you'd agree with me soon enough. You'd condemn him, without another thought. You shall judge! I'll tell you; and you shall be the judge between us.

JACQUES: The judge between you!

CLÉANTE: I agree to that.

JACQUES: As you will, dear Master; as you will—Oh Master Cléante, don't stand there, looking so fierce. A little further off, my good boy—a little further off—if I'm to be the judge—there!—while I listen to what your father has to say.

[*He has taken Cléante by the arm, and coaxed him a few steps away; then, hurries back to Harpagon.*]

HARPAGON (*speaking as Jacques reaches him*): I decide to re-marry; choose the lady; make the arrangements—and, if you please, along comes my son, and informs me he proposes to marry the lady himself.

JACQUES: Oh dear dear dear, No No No—

HARPAGON: Oh dear dear dear, Yes *Yes* YES—And he won't give way. No obedience. No respect. Just Defiance—What d'you think of that?

JACQUES: Shocking. He can't be serious—No, Master Cléante.

[*And he runs over to Cléante.*]

CLÉANTE (*speaking, as Jacques reaches him*): Jacques, in the town, I meet the loveliest young woman you've ever set eyes on. I bow; she smiles; I found out where she lived; I called; I fell in love;

and, miracle of miracles, she loves me. But she and her mother are poor—and now I find my father proposes to buy her, for himself. What d'you think of that?

JACQUES: Oh shocking shocking shocking. He must be joking.

CLÉANTE: A very bad joke!

[And he stalks a few steps further away, leaving Jacques, for the moment, by himself.]

JACQUES: Now what am I to do? There's only one thing I know; the truth's no good.

[He runs back to Harpagon.]

JACQUES: Master, it's all a mistake. He says he doesn't want to marry the lady—if you'll find him someone else he can be happy with.

HARPAGON: If he'll give up Mariane, he can have anyone he chooses. Anyone!

JACQUES: Leave it to me.

[And he runs back to Cléante.]

JACQUES: It's all a mistake. It's the way you behave makes him so angry. He'll let you marry the lady you love, if you'll only show him more respect.

CLÉANTE: If he'll give me Mariane, my respect for him will be unbounded.

JACQUES: Leave it to me.

[Back he runs to Harpagon.]

It's all arranged.

HARPAGON *(turning towards Cléante)*: Thank God for that!

JACQUES *(running back to Cléante)*: it's all fixed up.

CLÉANTE *(turning towards Harpagon)*: Heaven be praised!

JACQUES *(between the two)*: There, my Masters! You were quarrelling all for the want of a little tact.

forth—Confound it, boy, you might listen when I'm talking to you.

[*He realises that Cléante is staring agape, with eyes that are not focussing on him, but on something behind his back.*]

What is it? What's the matter? What have you seen? What are you staring at? Something in the garden?

[*He whisks round to have a look; but, as he does so, La Fleche moves out of sight.*]

What was it? What did you see? Something unusual? Something unusual in the garden? You must have done.

[*And he rushes off into the garden. Cléante watches him go and takes a few mystified steps after him—La Fleche, still with his load, appears in the other door-way.*]

LA FLECHE (*calling*): Master!

[*Cléante turns towards the voice; and then goes hastily to him.*]

CLÉANTE: Well, what is it? What d'you want?

LA FLECHE (*mysteriously*): Under the Currant Bushes!

CLÉANTE: Currant Bushes? What is all this? What are you talking about? What have you there?

LA FLECHE: Listen!

HARPAGON'S VOICE (*from the garden*): Thieves! Thieves! Thieves! Help! Thieves!

LA FLECHE: Quick, master—Out of his way!

[*As he disappears—followed by Cléante, Harpagon comes rushing in from the garden. He is utterly distraught; and runs madly about the stage.*]

HARPAGON: Thieves! Thieves! Murder! Fire!—

I'm lost; I'm finished; I'm done for. I've been robbed—Robbed, robbed, robbed. My money! It's gone! It's not there! Somebody's taken it. Who can have taken it? Who?—Who? Who Who Who Who Who Who Who—(*which develops into the strangest sobbing sound*)—Stolen! Stolen! Somebody's stolen it! Where have they gone? Where are they hiding? Where?

[*And he scuttles from exit to exit.*]

They must be somewhere! Of course they must. Somewhere. Oh, if I could lay my hands on 'em. My hands on 'em. My hands on 'em. . . . Oooh! Oooh! Wowh!

What's the matter? What's happening? Something's hurting! Oh look!

[*He has seized one of his wrists by his other hand.*]

I've got hold of myself! I've arrested myself! I don't know where I am. I don't know what I'm doing. I can't believe it. I can't. What I've been fearing—only I didn't really believe it could happen—but it has! Whether I believe it or not—Gone! All gone! Ten thousand crowns! Oh my money! My poor dear money! Where are you now? They've taken you away from me! How lonely you must be! There's nothing left! Nothing! No more meaning in anything! No Joy, no Happiness, no Purpose. My Comfort, my Consolation, my Support—gone. I shall never get over it. Never, Never, Never. I shall die—I'm dying, I'm dead, I'm buried—I don't know what I'm talking about! Steady, steady, steady, I must be calm. I must keep control of myself. I must think. What can I *do*? That's it—what can I *do*? Do? Do? Do? Do? *The Police*! Of course. Fetch ~~the~~ Police. They'll investigate. They'll find it. They'll get it back. Everybody in the house must be cross-examined.

Everybody. They must be *made* to confess; and if they won't, then put to the torture. No favouritism. The whole Household. All the Servants; my own children, my son and my daughter—and me, too, if necessary . . . Now, which of 'em do I suspect? I suspect 'em *all*. As I think of each one, I'm sure they did it.

[*Suddenly he claps his hands over his ears.*]

I can hear 'em laughing! They're laughing at me! Why? Why are they laughing? Because they *all* did it. They've all taken my money. That's it. They've all got a share of it. Laugh, laugh, laugh away. But I'll be revenged. Wait. Wait till I fetch the Police—and the Detectives and the Inspectors and the Superintendents; I'll fetch 'em all—and the Magistrates, and the Justices, and the Judges, and the Hangman—with his gallows. I'll hang 'em all! I'll hang the whole world! And if that doesn't do any good, if that doesn't get my money back—I'll hang myself . . . \

[*And, as he stumbles off, the stage darkens.*]

[*. . . the lights go up again.*]

[*A Justice of the Peace enters, followed by Harpagon.*]

JUSTICE (*talking as he enters*): You can leave it all to me, good Monsieur Harpagon, all to me. No need to get excited. Gracious Goodness Me, No. Heavens above, this isn't the first Robbery I've had to deal with. ~~Indeed, indeed, it isn't.~~ I only wish I had a hundred gold-pieces, for every thief I've caused to be hung.

HARPAGON: And that's what you've to do now: hang the thief. Catch him, and hang him, and quickly. And if you can't, I'll find another Justice who can. Every Justice in the neighbourhood must

concern himself over this. And if, together, they can't get my money back, I'll have justice on the Justices.

JUSTICE: Dear dear dear, irregular. Very irregular. No. We must follow the usual procedure. Now: this missing casket, you speak of—What was in it?

HARPAGON: My money!

JUSTICE: How much?

HARPAGON: Ten Thousand Crowns.

JUSTICE: *Ten* Thousand Crowns!

~~HARPAGON: Ten Thousand.~~

JUSTICE: ~~Ten Thousand~~—quite a Robbery.

HARPAGON: That's what I'm telling you! A terrible Robbery. The blackest in the whole history of Mankind. And if it goes unpunished, the most sacred things in Heaven and Earth are sacred and safe no more.

JUSTICE: Um—d'you suspect anyone?

HARPAGON: Yes.

JUSTICE: Good. Who?

HARPAGON: Everybody. You must put the whole town under arrest—and most of the Suburbs.

JUSTICE: Irregular. Very Irregular. No. We must proceed in the usual way, quietly and carefully. First sift the evidence, then collect and confirm the proofs, and then—seize our man.

HARPAGON: I can't wait. Let's seize him first.

[*Jacques enters, and talks over his shoulder as he enters.*]

JACQUES: First slit his throat. Then hang him from the ceiling; give his feet a good grilling, and soak 'em in boiling water.

HARPAGON (*to the Justice*): D'you hear that! He's got him! He's caught the thief. Jacques has caught the thief.

JACQUES (*seeing, and advancing to, Harpagon*): Oh, Monsieur—such unexpected happenings—you

could never guess—into my arms as it were, out of the blue.

HARPAGON: Who is it?

JACQUES: Who?

HARPAGON: Yes, who?

JACQUES: There's no "who"!

HARPAGON: What then?

JACQUES: Oh, Monsieur, the most divine little sucking pig. I'm having it prepared in a special way of my own.

HARPAGON: Never mind about that now. Never mind. This gentleman wants a word with you.

JACQUES: Is he coming to the Supper?

HARPAGON: He wants to ask you some questions.

JACQUES: Questions?

JUSTICE: Don't be alarmed, my man. Nothing to worry about. No need to be nervous—whatever you've done. I'll get it out of you!

JACQUES: Whatever I've done?

JUSTICE: Yes.

JACQUES: Well, as a matter of fact, it isn't!

JUSTICE: Isn't what?

JACQUES: Done. Not quite. But as soon as it is, you shall have it.

JUSTICE: You must keep nothing back.

JACQUES: No. Indeed No. Why should I? But, if it isn't all you want . . . Well . . . if I hadn't the money, what could I do?

JUSTICE: Oh, so you hadn't the money, eh? What have you done with it?

JACQUES: Done with what?

JUSTICE: The money!

JACQUES: What money?

HARPAGON: The money you stole!

JACQUES: Stole!

HARPAGON: And if you don't give it back, I'll have you hanged.

JUSTICE: No No No, you mustn't say things like

that. You mustn't talk to him in that way. Most irregular. No. I can see by his face, he's honest. ~~We shall get what we want out of him, without having to lock him up.~~ Now, my man, if you want to keep out of prison, all you have to do is to confess. No harm'll come to you, and you'll be suitably rewarded.

JACQUES: Confess!

JUSTICE: A large sum of money has been taken. You're the only man who can know about it. Tell us all.

JACQUES (*taking a few steps away, to himself*): Now what am I to say? Not the truth—even if I knew it. But what a chance to get my own back on that Steward.

HARPAGON: What's he muttering about?

JUSTICE: Let him alone. He's making up his mind to confess. I told you he was an honest man.

JACQUES (*returning to Harpagon*): Dear Master, if you must know, it was your Steward.

HARPAGON: My Steward?

JACQUES: Yes.

HARPAGON: Valère! Monsieur Valère!

JACQUES: Yes.

HARPAGON: The only man I thought I could trust.

JACQUES: That's him. He did it.

JUSTICE: What makes you think so?

JACQUES: Um?—What—What makes me think so?

JUSTICE: Yes.

JACQUES: I think so, because—I think so!

JUSTICE: But you must have your reasons.

JACQUES: Oh Yes, I have my reasons.

HARPAGON: For instance, did you see him hanging round the place where I put it?

JACQUES: Yes, I did—Where did you put it?

HARPAGON: In the garden.

JACQUES: That's right. I saw him hanging about in the garden. Where did you keep it?

HARPAGON: In a casket.

JACQUES: That's right. I saw him with a casket.

JUSTICE: What was it like?

JACQUES: What was what like?

JUSTICE: The Casket. (*To Harpagon*) We'll soon find out whether it was the missing one. (*To Jacques*) Well!!

JACQUES: What was it like?

JUSTICE: Yes.

JACQUES: Well, it was—it was like a casket.

JUSTICE: Of course, of course. But I want details. Its *size*—what about that? Was it large?

JACQUES: Small.

HARPAGON: Mine was large.

JACQUES: Oh—of course it was “large”, if you compare it to a snuff-box. I called it “small”, because I was comparing it to the Town Hall.

HARPAGON: That's true enough. It would be small if you compared it to the Town Hall—it sounds very like mine.

JUSTICE: What colour was it?

JACQUES: Colour!

JUSTICE: Yes.

JACQUES: I'm not very good at colours. It's difficult. (*To Harpagon*) How would you describe its colour?

HARPAGON: Me?

JUSTICE: Don't answer.

JACQUES (*taking a shot*): A kind of—of red.

HARPAGON: Blue.

JACQUES: That's what I mean, a reddish-blue, or, as you might say, a blueish-red.

HARPAGON: That's right, it's mine, there's no doubt. Oh Valère, Valère—who would have thought it. After this, I can believe I'm capable of robbing myself.

JACQUES: Here he comes! Monsieur, if you want the truth, don't tell him what I said.

[*Valère enters.*]

HARPAGON: There he is! The black-hearted scoundrel!

[*Valère stops in surprise.*]

Hi, you! Come here! Here! Come here!

[*Valère advances towards Harpagon, in speechless amazement.*]

(*As Valère reaches him*): Well! What have you to say for yourself?

VALÈRE: Monsieur!

HARPAGON: How dare you call me Monsieur!

VALÈRE: I beg your pardon!

HARPAGON: How dare you beg my pardon. There's only one thing for you to do now;—Confess. Confess!

[*Valère stares at him.*]

Oh, how can you stand there and look one in the face, with the weight of your abominable sin on your conscience. What a betrayal! What treachery! I take you into my household; I trust you above all others; I treat you as one of the family—and this is my reward. This infamous, this utterly unspeakable, theft.

VALÈRE (*quietly*): Monsieur, since, obviously, everything has been discovered, I'll make no attempt to deny it.

JACQUES: My God, I've guessed right!

JUSTICE: What's this? You admit it?

VALÈRE: How can I do otherwise?

HARPAGON: You mean: you don't deny it?

VALÈRE: Why should I? My only regret is that you've found out.

HARPAGON: Your only regret!

VALÈRE: For some days past, I've been meaning to discuss it with you.

HARPAGON: Discuss it!

VALÈRE: But now that you know, I beg you not to be angry.

HARPAGON: Angry! Not to be angry! What d'you expect? D'you expect me to throw my arms around your neck, and kiss you on both cheeks!

VALÈRE: Monsieur Harpagon, that I've done you a great wrong, I admit.

HARPAGON: Oh you do, do you! You go as far as that!

VALÈRE: But, after all, my offence is understandable!

HARPAGON: Understandable! You rob me of the most precious thing in all my house.

VALÈRE: I agree, I agree. Of course, I agree. But it isn't as if your great treasure had fallen into bad hands.

HARPAGON: Bad hands!

VALÈRE: It isn't as if I'd acted in any sense of greed. Or envy; or hatred. No. From the very first moment that I entered your house, and my eyes fell on the object of my desire, I've been actuated only by love.

HARPAGON: Love!—Of my money!

VALÈRE: Oh Monsieur Harpagon—No, No, No. I wouldn't have you think that—not for a moment. Your great wealth, your Riches mean nothing to me. Money! After all, what's money? I don't want a penny of your money—as long as you let me keep what I've got!

HARPAGON: Keep what you've got! (*To the Justice*) Did you hear that?

VALÈRE: And if you'll listen to me, I'm sure I can convince you it's your duty to do so.

HARPAGON: Duty!

VALÈRE: Monsieur, that which I've robbed you of, *you* haven't lost. It's still *yours*. Nor can it ever again be taken from *me*!

HARPAGON: I'm going mad!

VALÈRE (*with deep feeling*): For never, good Monsieur Harpagon, never again, in this life—whatever you may say, whatever you may do, can we be parted! Bound together, as we are, irrevocably, by our mutual oath.

HARPAGON: *He's* mad! The fear of the gallows has driven him out of his senses!

HARPAGON (*with a sudden rush of fury, he raises his voice to a shout*): What have you done with what you've taken?

VALÈRE: Done, Monsieur?

JUSTICE (*shouting too*): Still in the house?

VALÈRE: Why yes, of course.

HARPAGON: Intact?

VALÈRE: Monsieur?

HARPAGON: You haven't *tampered*, in any way?

VALÈRE: Monsieur, you insult me! You insult us both! You insult all three of us!

HARPAGON: *Three*?

VALÈRE: You insult me; you insult yourself—and you insult your daughter.

HARPAGON: What, in God's name, has my daughter to do with it?

VALÈRE: I do assure you, Monsieur, from the depths of my soul, she's in no way to blame.

HARPAGON: I should hope not, indeed.

VALÈRE: From the first, she's been Modesty itself. It's taken me all the time since I first came into your house, to gain her consent.

HARPAGON: Her consent? What consent! Her consent to what?

VALÈRE: To the Engagement.

HARPAGON: What engagement?

VALÈRE: *Our* engagement.

HARPAGON: *Ours*? Whose?

VALÈRE: Your daughter's; and mine.

HARPAGON: My daughter; and *you*—an “Engagement”—in marriage?

VALÈRE: What else?

HARPAGON (*with a great cry*): Oh Infamy, Infamy, Infamy!

[*Elise re-appears, with Mariane, and Frosine.*]

HARPAGON (*continuing, without seeing them*): Outrage upon Outrage!

[*He sees Elise.*]

[*And, with another cry, runs to her; seizes her by the wrist, and drags her into the middle of the stage.*]

[*He flings her on to her knees—where she remains.*]

[*The old man is, for the moment, possessed by an uncontrollable passion.*]

HARPAGON: Wretched girl!—Wretched, wretched, wretched!

[*He stoops over her; wriggling his fingers.*]

I can scarce keep my fingers from your throat. I could throttle the life out of you.

VALÈRE: How can you speak so to your own daughter?

HARPAGON: I shall speak as I choose. Give yourself to a servant, and a thief, would you! I’ve only one thing to be thankful for: I’ve found out in time. Four thick walls shall be answerable for you, my girl; till you’re married to the man of my choice. And as for you (*he rounds on Valère*)—you’ll be swinging from a gallows before you’re a day older.

VALÈRE: Monsieur, at least *listen* to me, before we’re thus condemned.

HARPAGON: Listen! *Listen!* I’ve been listening to you for the last five minutes, and I’ve heard enough.

ÉLISE: Father, I beg you! Don’t abuse your authority over me: in the first flush of your anger. You’ll

look with kindlier eyes on my lover, I know you will, when you learn he's not what you think he is.
HARPAGON: I know that already, thank you! And I'll not hear another word from either of you! (*He swings round on the Justice*): Justice!

JUSTICE: Yes, Monsieur?

HARPAGON: You've been listening?

JUSTICE: Of course, Monsieur.

HARPAGON: You heard this man confess?—on every count?

JUSTICE: Yes, Monsieur.

HARPAGON: Do your duty! 'Arrest him! Take him away!

JUSTICE: Yes, Monsieur.

[*He approaches Valère.*]

VALÈRE (*with tremendous ferocity*): Touch me, at your peril.

JUSTICE (*in terror; to Harpagon*): I must fetch my men. *Rum*

HARPAGON: Stay here. He's getting dangerous.

FROSINE: Here's a To-do! And here comes the old Seigneur Anselm himself—to claim his bride. *Now*—what's to happen?

[*The Seigneur Anselm appears.*]

[*The Seigneur is an up-standing silver-grey-haired elderly man of great distinction. He pauses for a moment in the entrance.*]

HARPAGON (*seeing him*): There's the Seigneur! Seigneur Anselm! Oh, Seigneur Anselm!

ANSELM (*advancing to him*): My dear Harpagon! What is it? What can be the matter? You look distraught! Beside yourself!

HARPAGON: So would you be! See that fellow there!—that one!—with Crime written all over him—he's stolen my money.

VALÈRE: *What's that?*

HARPAGON: And planned to steal my daughter—and that reminds me: of course! What am I thinking about! That concerns *you*—doesn't it—you've come to get married! Yes, of course! He was planning to steal your wife! Well—there he stands, self-confessed. Take your revenge.

ANSELM (*with unruffled dignity. He treats Harpagon with a slightly amused contempt*): My good Harpagon, I assure you I have no intention of marrying any woman against her will; and, in particular, I would not dream of holding your daughter to any arrangement, if her heart is elsewhere. But, for yourself, my dear Harpagon, if you've been wronged, why, to be sure I'll protect your interests, as if they were my own.

HARPAGON: Well said, well said. (*To Valère, indicating Anselm*) The Chief Magistrate of the Town! (*To Anselm, indicating Valère*) You deal with him. Take over his case—and make it as black against him as you can!

VALÈRE (*with a sudden flash of anger*): I must protest!! Why should my affection, my love, for your daughter be called a crime?

HARPAGON: Why! Why! *You*—a rascally servant.

VALÈRE: True, in your eyes, I am a servant; nor can I blame you for that. It was part of my deception.

HARPAGON: Hark at him!

VALÈRE: But I'd have you know, Monsieur Harpagon.

[*A kind of authority is growing in Valère, as he speaks.*]

I'd have you know: that in myself, I am of Gentle, even Noble, birth.

HARPAGON: Rubbish! Stuff-and-Nonsense! Fiddlesticks! D'you expect me to believe *that*? The world's crowded with such Impostors—taking

advantage of being Nobodies to pretend they're Somebody.

VALÈRE (*with a fine indignation*): You wrong me, Monsieur; indeed you do. Never would I make *any* claim to which I hadn't *every* right. I'll go further: there's no living soul throughout the whole great city of Naples, who couldn't bear witness to the truth of what I'm about to tell you!

ANSELM: Naples! Take care, young man! I must warn you: I know Naples—as if it were my own house. I can most easily test the truth of anything you may say.

VALÈRE: You know Naples?

ANSELM: Every stone of it.

VALÈRE: Then you've heard of the Count of Alberti.

ANSELM (*completely taken by surprise*): The Count of Alberti?

VALÈRE: You've heard of him?

ANSELM: Why yes, I've heard of him! Even I might say, in a way, I knew him.

VALÈRE: You *knew* him?

ANSELM: No man better.

[*This time it is Valère's turn to be taken utterly by surprise. For a moment, the two men stare at each other. Harpagon breaks in.*]

HARPAGON: What's all this? What's this to do with it? What do I care for Count What-is-Name? Or any Count? Or anyone else?

ANSELM: Let him alone, good Harpagon, let him alone. Give him rope; and, if he goes on like this, in a few moments, he'll be tied in a thousand knots . . . Well, young man, we're waiting. What more have you to tell us?

VALÈRE: That the Count of Alberti, of whom you've heard; and whom you profess to have known, was my father.

ANSELM: Your father!

VALÈRE: My father.

[*Anselm regards him, for a moment, in utter amazement—then bursts into laughter.*]

ANSELM: Really! This is too fantastic! You'll have to think of a better story than that.

[*And he laughs again.*]

VALÈRE (*livid with rage*): I'll trouble you to stop that noise!

[*The laugh dies on the Seigneur's lips, as if he'd been struck.*]

How dare you doubt my words?

ANSELM (*now matching anger with anger*): And how dare such a claim pass your lips? Your impudence, your audacity, are beyond bearing. I suppose you made choice of such a Parent—one of the wealthiest and noblest men of the city—because you knew he'd been dead some twenty years—and cannot be here, himself, to give you the lie.

VALÈRE: Sixteen years ago, he was fleeing from the Revolution in Naples; the ship in which he was making his escape, struck on a rock, and sank.

ANSELM: So! You know that much! Unfortunately for you, I can add to that: his wife, and his two children—his son and daughter; *his only son*—were with him on that ship; and perished with him, on that same night.

VALÈRE (*quietly*): The son was saved. I can remember those moments, as if they were now . . .

[*He pauses for a moment, and seems to look into the distance. All the others are intent on what he is to say.*]

VALÈRE: My father—the most honoured guest on the ship—was with the Captain on his bridge; I had

just said good-night to my little sister; my mother had taken her below to bed; they had just disappeared along the deck. I was standing by the ship's side, gazing down into the passing sea, in charge of a family servant. My hand was in his. Below me, stars danced in the black water, above they filled the sky—the night was very still. Only the lap and swish of the sea, and the slow creaking of the ship . . . then a sudden grinding crash—and I found myself in the sea. I struck out; I felt an arm round me—it was the old servant; he supported me; gained a piece of wreckage; pulled me up beside him; and on it, we drifted till morning. And when the dawn came, there was no sign of the ship, nor of any survivors. But before the next night fell, we were picked up by a boat on its way to Spain . . . only recently, as I was, at length, making my way back to my native city, I saw Élise. From that moment, where she was, was home.

[He moves to her.]

I took service with her father, so as never to leave her side again.

[Mariane moves to him, so that she can speak to him, face to face.]

MARIANE: This old family servant, whom you spoke of, and in whose charge you were—was his name Pedro?

VALÈRE: Why, yes, of course! Old Pedro! . . . But how d'you know? How can you possibly know?

MARIANE: I, and my mother, had hardly reached our cabin, when the ship struck. She seized me up, and was thrown into the sea, clasping me in her arms. Some sailors dragged us on to a raft; for days and nights we were on it; and were rescued by some fishing boats near to the coast of Africa. How often have I heard it from my Mother. My father

on the bridge with the Captain, my brother on the deck with old Pedro.

VALÈRE: Your brother!

ANSELM: Have you any further proof of this strange story, in which you so strangely agree.

VALÈRE (*holding out his hand*): My father's ring. He gave it to Pedro; and, on his death-bed, old Pedro gave it back to *me*—

[*Anselm bends, for a moment, over Valère's outstretched hand to look at the ring. Then stands upright.*]

ANSELM: The ways of God are mysterious. How well I remember giving that ring to old Pedro!

VALÈRE: You?

ANSELM: I, too, was saved! With the Captain, I found myself in a small boat, but with a company of sailors whose one thought was home. They resisted every command, every entreaty, to remain, even for a moment, on the scene of the wreck. They turned the boat towards home, and their oars dipped and pulled, pulled and dipped, till we beached on the shores of Italy. Caring little whether I lived or died, I returned to Naples; to find my Palace and my Estates untouched; and there I have lived for sixteen years, mourning the loss of my wife and children. I came here, under an assumed name, to start life anew: and here, miracle of miracles, I find the old one—my two children, and my wife. *James*.

HARPAGON: Here, Hi, what's going on? Let me get hold of things—the right end of the stick—are you saying this man is your son?

ANSELM: I am.

HARPAGON: Then I hold you responsible for all the money he's stolen from me!—ten thousand Crowns!

ANSELM: Stolen money—my son!

VALÈRE: What's all this about the stealing of money?

HARPAGON: Well, you told me so yourself!

VALÈRE: *I* told you?

HARPAGON: Yes—so did he. (*Pointing to Jacques.*)

JACQUES: *Me?*

HARPAGON: Yes, you.

VALÈRE (*advancing on Jacques*): You told Monsieur Harpagon that I'd stolen his money! What were you thinking about? What have you to say for yourself?

JACQUES: Nothing! I say nothing! Oh, good Monsieur Valère, it was you yourself taught me that truth was no good; now I've found out for myself that lies are no better; so henceforth, for the rest of my life, I keep silent. I say nothing.

HARPAGON: But this is terrible! If you didn't take my money, who did? I want my money back!

[*Cléante enters.*]

CLÉANTE (*as he comes on*): It's all right, dear father. You've nothing to worry about. I know where it is.

HARPAGON: You know!

CLÉANTE: And all you have to do is to agree to my marrying Mariane and you shall have it back.

HARPAGON: Where is it?

CLÉANTE: Oh, no, no, no! But it's safe! Now, make up your mind! Give me Mariane; or lose your money.

HARPAGON: My Casket! Has it been opened?

CLÉANTE: Yes.

HARPAGON: Oh! Oh, oh, oh! And the ten thousand Crowns gone!

CLÉANTE: No. Not a piece.

HARPAGON: How d'you know?

CLÉANTE: You shall see for yourself, the moment after you say "yes".

MARIANE (*going to Cléante; and putting her hand in his*): But, my dearest, your father's consent is no longer enough. For Heaven, in its great Goodness,

has restored me a father. And now, you must ask *his* consent, too.

ANSELM: And I'm quite sure Heaven hasn't restored you a father, to forbid you to marry the man you love! So come, my dear Harpagon, agree, as I do, to this double marriage—your son to my daughter; and your daughter to my son.

HARPAGON: . . . I haven't got any money to give 'em.

ANSELM: Then it's fortunate I have.

HARPAGON: I shall want a new coat for the wedding—will you buy me a new coat?

ANSELM: With all my heart.

JUSTICE (*suddenly emerging from the background*): And who's going to pay *me*?

HARPAGON: You! What do you want paying for? Hang that fellow (*pointing to Jacques*) for a False Witness, and we'll think about it.

JACQUES: Alas, Alas! Beaten for telling the truth, hanged for telling lies, and my beautiful sucking pig burned to a cinder!

ANSELM: In which case, I propose we all repair to *my* house; where my Chef will provide a Wedding Feast. Let the young couples lead the way—before my Coachman drives away home.

VALÈRE: Élise!

[*And he takes her by the hand, toward the door.*]

CLÉANTE: Mariane!

[*And he does likewise.*]

ANSELM (*to the others*): Follow! You're all invited.

[*And the others follow. Leaving the Seigneur alone with Harpagon.*]

Come along, old Harpagon, come along

[*He goes—and Harpagon is following.*]

[From the opposite entrance, La Fleche staggers on with the box in his arms; he puts it down—the noise of which catches Harpagon's attention, just as he is disappearing. He turns; sees his box, gives a screech that might lift the roof off the house, and rushes back at it . . .]

[La Fleche, thinking the old man is rushing at him, dashes off, like greased lightning; and Harpagon is left, embracing his box.]

HARPAGON: Oh my Own! My Treasure! My Precious! . . . How are you?

[He lifts back the lid.]

Are you all there? Have you been ravaged? . . . No—doesn't look like it . . . But how can I tell? . . . They may have taken some from the bottom Better find out! . . .

[He begins picking out the gold pieces, counting as he does so.]

One—Two—Three.

[He hesitates . . . and looks in the direction in which the others have gone . . .]

The Feast!—I'm hungry!—No!

[And he returns to his box, continuing to pick out the coins and to count.]

Four—Five—Six—

[The curtain comes down, but rises almost at once. Harpagon is surrounded by little piles of gold coins—and getting into a most terrible state as he keeps adding them up wrongly.]

[Curtain.]

THE PARAGON

A play in two acts

by

*ROLAND and MICHAEL
PERTWEE*

The following was the cast of *The Paragon* at the first performance at the Fortune Theatre, London, on May 10, 1948:

DELIVERY MAN	-	-	<i>Tony Thawnton</i>
KATE	-	-	<i>Lola Duncan</i>
JOAN	-	-	<i>Rachel Kempson</i>
JESSICA	-	-	<i>Nan Braunton</i>
THE EARL OF CLANDON	-		<i>Arthur Wontner</i>
SIR ROBERT RAWLEY		-	<i>Walter Fitzgerald</i>
ANGELA	-	-	<i>Elizabeth Kentish</i>
MAXWELL OLIVER	-	-	<i>Anthony Marlowe</i>
THE UNKNOWN MAN		-	<i>Hugh Burden</i>

The Play was directed by Norman Marshall.

It ran for 152 performances.

All enquiries regarding performance of this play must be made to English Theatre Guild Ltd., 75 Berwick Street, London, W.1.

Characters

in order of their appearance

DELIVERY MAN

KATE

JOAN

JESSICA

THE EARL OF CLANDON

SIR ROBERT RAWLEY

ANGELA

MAXWELL OLIVER

THE UNKNOWN MAN

SCENES

*The action throughout occurs in the study of
Sir Robert Rawley's house in the Vale of Avalon.*

ACT I

SCENE I *A Spring afternoon.*

SCENE 2 *An hour later.*

ACT II

The action is continuous.

TIME—1946

ACT ONE

Scene I

6.30, LATE AFTERNOON, IN THE SPRING OF 1946.

The Study of Sir Robert Rawley's house in the Vale of Avalon. The room, which is on the first floor and handsomely furnished, has the dignity of age and overlooks, through two long windows at the back, and over the low balustrade of a balcony, an open rolling countryside, fringed with quiet hills. There is a door up audience left leading to the stairs and front door, and a second smaller door U.R. Above this is a standard lamp and below is a longish table on which is a cigar box, a table lighter, a neat pile of black-edged invitation cards and a table lamp. Between the two long windows is a drinks table with a tray of drinks, glasses, water jug, a box of cigarettes, matches and an ashtray. Robert's high wing chair stands R.C., beside it a small occasional table with a box of cigarettes, a small square ashtray, matches, and a silver-framed photograph of his son Simon. C. is an elbow chair. Between window and door U.L., is a small armchair. D.L. is a couch, behind which is a table with a telephone, table lamp, periodicals and an ashtray. Above the couch is a radiogram. A chandelier hangs from the centre of the ceiling. Being a room in the house of a blind man, the position of the furniture is very precise and is never altered. When anything is inadvertently moved some member of the household automatically restores it to its proper place.

The Curtain rises on an empty stage, then the door U.L. is opened by Kate to allow a Delivery Man to enter carrying a fair-sized crate. Kate, a parlour-maid of the old school, tries, against heavy odds, to apply the early phraseology and traditions of her calling to the present age.

MAN: Where'll you have it?

KATE: On the table over there.

[*Kate shuts door. The Man, moving between chairs C., kicks one of them. Kate goes quickly to it, puts it back into position.*]

And don't bump into things with those great feet of yours! We don't move furniture in this house, we go round it. Everything must be in its right place or the master will ask why.

MAN: Why?

KATE: Because he's the master.

MAN: One of the pernickity sort, eh?

KATE: No, he's blind.

MAN: Well I never! Can't see, you mean?

KATE: I could hardly have meant anything else, could I? Get along now, I haven't all day to waste.

[*Kate moves cigar box and invitation cards to L. of table and takes table lighter to drinks table. Man dumps crate on the floor.*]

MAN: There you are.

KATE: Before it's a case of there you are we'll have it out of the crate.

[*The Man starts unpacking paper from crate.*]

And don't strew the place with bits! I've plenty on my hands without.

MAN: Short staffed, eh?

KATE: Never mind about our arrangements, attend to what you're doing.

MAN (*getting on with it*): You don't seem too pleased about something.

KATE: What does and doesn't please me is my affair and you may be one of them.

[*Puzzled, the Man continues detaching the wrapping and reveals a well-constructed, if rather modern and utilitarian, model of a single-storey sports' building.*]

MAN (*regarding it*): Well, I never. What is it, a doll's house?

KATE: Does it look like a doll's house?

MAN: Yes.

KATE: Then it isn't. It's a sports' club pavilion as you would see for yourself if you could read.

[*The Man leans forward to read a small brass plate attached to the front of the pavilion.*]

MAN (*reading aloud*): "Erected in proud memory of Second Lieutenant Simon Rawley, only son of Robert Rawley, who fell in action at Caen on the 12th June, 1944. He died but his memory shall live." (*He nods sympathetically*) Only son, eh?

KATE: They wouldn't say so if he was one of a dozen.

MAN: That's right. There was a Rawley played cricket for Warwick.

KATE: That was him.

MAN: A good all-rounder. It was worth what you paid to get in to see him alone. (*He looks at the model again*) Funny idea having it this size. Don't see how anyone'll get much out of it.

[*Kate eyes him with complete scorn.*]

KATE: This is a model of what's being put up on a playing field which will be opened with a ceremony on Monday next.

MAN (*relieved*): Ar! I was going to say.

KATE: You did and what you said was foolishness. Now if you want a cup of tea you'd better hurry before I get too busy with my dinner table.

[*As she speaks she removes a lighter from the side table and puts it on the drinks table. The Man, stooping to pick up a thread of hopsacking, moves the small table by chair. Kate hastens forward, clicking her tongue angrily.*]

Do you want to break his neck? (*She replaces the*

table) The master knows to a hair where everything is.

MAN: Well I never.

[As they go to the door, Joan, Robert Rawley's second wife, and Miss Jessica Streatford, a bleak, elderly lady with spiritualistic tendencies, who, because of her choice of printed linens, looks as if she has been upholstered rather than dressed, come into the room. She carries a cretonne work-bag with a confusion of wool in it. Joan, who is about twenty-six, has a straightforward way of looking at life which is endearing when it isn't embarrassing. She looks at the man interrogatively. He touches his hat.]

KATE: This is the man with the model from London, m'lady.

JOAN: Yes, we saw the van outside. Thank you so much.

MAN: Bin a nice day, hasn't it?

JOAN: Yes, very.

[Kate and the Man go to the door. Jessica gives a little cry on seeing the model and flutters towards it. Kate turns back in the open doorway.]

KATE: While I think of it, m'lady, I've moved the cigar box and invitation cards to the right side of the side table, and put the lighter on the drinks table.

JOAN: I'll tell Sir Robert.

[Kate goes out, closing the door.]

JESSICA: Isn't it splendid! Quite lifelike! Robert will be pleased. It's unlike any other building in the neighbourhood.

JOAN (nodding): Yes, I'm afraid it is!

[She, too, approaches the model and stands looking at it from beneath clouded brows.]

JESSICA: But I still think a nice monument would have been more in keeping.

JOAN: What's the use of a monument—except for birds?

JESSICA: Birds? Oh, *birds*. Yes. But I don't think they mean any disrespect. What I feel is that a sports' club isn't a very religious way of remembering anybody.

JOAN: It isn't supposed to be. Robert wants it to be useful—thank goodness.

JESSICA: I only hope dear Simon will approve. I shall certainly ask him next time he materialises.

JOAN (*patiently*): Do you think the plans for the pavilion will have reached the spirit world yet?

JESSICA (*sitting and fumbling in her work-bag*): Of course. What happens *here* is transmitted *there* with the speed of thought. But what troubles me is that if Simon had liked the idea I'm sure he would have mentioned it before. It would be a dreadful thing if he objected.

[*Joan walks away to the couch, then turns to Jessica, who is winding up the short lengths of wool which have got into a tangle.*]

JOAN: Jessica, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but if by any chance Simon decided to make one of his startling appearances at the opening ceremony, please keep it to yourself. You know how Robert hates it and it would be so disconcerting if people thought you were talking to yourself.

JESSICA: I suppose, as usual, you're trying to say that I imagine these phenomena.

JOAN: I only feel we have worries enough without trying to invoke rather pointless ghosts who never say anything sensible.

JESSICA: That's a very ignorant remark. I remember my poor sister once saying: "There are more things

in my philosophy than you will ever dream of in heaven"—or was it earth?

JOAN (*with a sigh*): It was both—originally.

JESSICA: Last time Simon materialised he said he was very, very happy.

JOAN: If we get our deserts in after life that can't have been true.

JESSICA: I do wish you wouldn't talk that way. Visitors from the other side can be most vindictive when you're rude about them. At one seance I attended a woman who was flippant had a very nasty pinch from her Uncle Sebastian.

JOAN: Simon never reached the pinching age.

JESSICA (*looking before her*): Poor dear boy! I can see him now with his pretty blue cap, scoring a hundred goals.

JOAN (*blinking*): Was this in heaven?

JESSICA: No, dear, at Lords.

JOAN: A hundred goals would justify a memorial if nothing else did.

JESSICA (*reproachfully*): You know, Joan, you're funny about Simon. You never speak of him as if you feel his loss.

JOAN: Why should I? I hardly knew him. To me he was just a scapegrace young man with an extraordinary gift for playing cricket, signing schoolboys' autograph books and laying traps for their pretty sisters.

JESSICA: If poor Sybil could hear you talk like that she would turn in her grave.

JOAN: Why? Don't people learn the truth about each other in the spirit world?

JESSICA: Robert wouldn't like it either. Simon was the apple of his father's eye.

JOAN (*quietly*): And he's been blind half his life.

JESSICA: I sometimes wonder if you're jealous of Robert's affection for Simon because you've had no child of your own.

[Joan draws in a sharp breath then clamps down on an angry retort.]

JOAN: How clever of you to think of that.

JESSICA: Robert was devoted to poor Sybil and but for the hope of another son he would never have been so disloyal to her memory as to marry again.

JOAN: Would you like me to go out of the room while you're saying these things?

JESSICA: Why, dear? They weren't meant unpleasantly. I'm sure you're just as disappointed as he is.

JOAN: Thank you.

JESSICA: There ought really to be some means of finding out if girls are all right that way before marriage.

JOAN: Why not start a clinic for doing that? It would be much more useful than staring at a crystal ball for hours on end.

JESSICA: I shouldn't know how to begin.

JOAN: Really? From the way you talked I thought you were an expert.

JESSICA: Now you're being rude.

JOAN: I'm sorry, but I don't like your suggestion that Robert married me for—a reason which didn't come off.

JESSICA: Well, whatever the reason he was passionately devoted to poor Sybil.

JOAN: He may have been, but when he asked me to be his wife he wasn't thinking of Sybil or anyone but me.

JESSICA: Yes, but that was just after the air-raid at the works when he wasn't quite himself.

[Further discussion is prevented by the telephone ringing.]

JOAN *(at 'phone)*: Yes?

JESSICA: I wonder if that's . . . ?

JOAN (*at 'phone*): Yes, I'll take it.

JESSICA: No, it can't be. Who is it?

[*Joan gestures her to be quiet.*]

Well, I only asked.

JOAN (*at 'phone*): Right. No, don't bother to send a confirmation. (*She hangs up*) A wire from Angela. She's coming down by car.

JESSICA: Where from?

JOAN: It was handed in at Victoria. She must have arrived there on the boat train.

[*Joan rings bell.*]

JESSICA: I'm thankful she's coming for the ceremony. It would have looked most peculiar if Simon's widow hadn't been there.

JOAN: Robert will be pleased, anyway.

JESSICA: She doesn't visit us very often does she? Perhaps she feels the old associations would be too much for her. Her devotion to Simon was very like Robert's devotion to poor Sybil.

JOAN (*at the end of her patience*): Jessica!

[*Joan is about to make some reply, but before she does so Kate comes in looking flustered.*]

KATE: It's the Earl of Clandon, m'lady.

JOAN: What's the matter with him? Is he dead?

KATE: No, m'lady—in the hall taking off his trouser clips.

JESSICA (*aghast*): Taking off his what?

KATE: His clips, Miss. He came on a bicycle.

JOAN: What does he want?

KATE: Sir Robert, m'lady. I said he was out, but that you was in and he said might he come up?

JOAN: Of course. Oh, Kate, Mrs. Simon is coming down by car. If she isn't in time for dinner we must keep something hot for her.

KATE: I'll tell Cook.

[*Kate goes out.*]

JESSICA: Kate should know better than to leave Lord Clandon by the umbrella stand.

JOAN: Don't worry. There aren't any umbrellas.

JESSICA: That's not in very good taste, Joan. I've always wished we had had friendlier relations with the Clandons. Perhaps he is going to ask us to dinner.

JOAN: He's more likely to suggest that we ask them.

[*Kate enters, ushering in Lord Clandon, a charming, if rather derelict Georgian, between sixty-five and seventy.*]

KATE: Lord Clandon, m'lady.

[*As Kate retires, Clandon approaches Jessica with an outstretched hand.*]

CLANDON: How d'ye do, Lady Rawley? Delighted to make your acquaintance.

JESSICA: But I'm not . . .

CLANDON: Eh?

JESSICA: . . . Lady Rawley. *She* is.

CLANDON (*turning to Joan*): Of course! God bless my soul! Forgive me. How very foolish. I'd forgotten I'd be meetin' so young and charmin' a hostess. (*Then conscious that he has made a gaffe, he swings round to Jessica, wagging a forefinger*) Not that I mean . . . er . . . No, no, no.

JOAN (*offering a hand*): How are you? You wanted Robert, didn't you?

CLANDON: Well, I just dropped in for a chat, but . . .

JOAN: He won't be long. He's just gone down to the village to see, or rather feel, how the workmen are getting on with the pavilion.

CLANDON (*nodding*): Amazin' fellow the way he gets about. Great courage.

JOAN: Great determination.

CLANDON (*he takes a look round the room*): Haven't been in this room since poor old Wetherby died in forty-one. You've made some changes.

JOAN: For better or worse?

CLANDON: Well, you know what we old Tories are about changes. You've some nice bits of walnut though.

JOAN: Robert likes the feel of it.

CLANDON: Yes, to be sure, yes. (*He wanders to table and looks at the frame photograph*) That's the boy, Simon, eh?

JESSICA: Yes—my nephew.

CLANDON: He was a great fella! Saw him knock up a fine score at the Oval in a Gentlemen *v.* Players match.

JOAN: Do sit down. (*Then, as Clandon approaches one of the two chairs C.*) No, this one or Robert might come in and sit on your lap.

CLANDON (*crossing to couch*): That would never do. Let's see. Weren't you a Streatford before you married Rawley? One of the Hereford lot?

JOAN (*gravely*): I was a secretary. Robert got me from "Universal Aunts."

CLANDON (*wagging an admonitory forefinger*): You're tryin' to pull my leg, young lady!

JESSICA (*casting a hostile glance at Joan*): My sister, Sybil, his *first* wife, was a Streatford.

CLANDON: Of course! Stupid of me. One forgets.

JESSICA (*sadly*): Yes, Robert never really recovered from her death.

JOAN (*smiling*): Miss Streatford believes he married me as a sort of sleeping draught.

CLANDON: And very nice, too . . . My wife and I have been meanin' to pay our respects, but peace hasn't turned out as well as we'd hoped. Since we got back to Marples she's been doing all the cookin' and seldom gets further than the pig sties with a pail of swill.

JOAN: Was Marples in an awful mess?

CLANDON: Might have been worse. A lot of rude things written on the walls, some of 'em passably amusin'. There was one little ditty that went . . . *(he glances at Jessica and checks himself)* No, better not, perhaps. We would like to have had you along for a cup of tea, but the woman who does for us in the mornings drinks so much of the stuff that we don't get a look in. That's a respectable lookin' body you've got. Better not let my wife get the hooks into her.

JOAN: I won't.

[Clandon takes a watch from his pocket and looks at it.]

CLANDON: Mustn't stop too long. My nephew, Max, is comin' down this evening on leave.

JESSICA: Somebody was telling me he's a doctor.

CLANDON: Yes, that's right. You must wonder what the aristocracy's comin' to taking up medicine as a profession.

JESSICA *(vaguely)*: Yes.

JOAN: It's high time they did something useful.

CLANDON: High time. Yet my old father wouldn't sit at table with a leech. It even went against the grain with him to admit that one of 'em brought him into the world.

JESSICA: I suppose your nephew took to medicine before he knew he was going to inherit?

[Joan frowns reprovingly at Jessica.]

CLANDON *(sadly)*: Yes, he could hardly have known that.

JESSICA: I wonder if he could spare the time to look at my pelvis one of these days?

CLANDON: I'm sure he would. Why not? I'd look at almost anything for a fee. I'm not very clear

what a pelvis is though. Always thought it was something you hang the curtains on.

JOAN (*with an eye on Jessica's skirt*): In some cases it is. (*She walks up to the window and looks out.*)

CLANDON (*rising*): Well, I mustn't keep you ladies any longer.

JOAN: Robert must be here soon. Yes—here he comes—along the cinder track through the fields.

CLANDON (*joining Joan*): Well, in that case . . . yes, there he is. Wish I could walk as fast and as firmly as he does. Remarkable.

JOAN: He's only fifty.

[*Clandon has another look at Simon's photograph.*]

CLANDON: What happened to his boy's wife?

[*They come D.S. together.*]

JOAN: She's coming here from Berlin today. She joined the Control Commission.

CLANDON: Berlin, eh? That's where my nephew's been. Hated the place.

JESSICA: Poor Simon heartily disapproved of her going there.

CLANDON: Did he? But . . . surely it was after his death that . . .

JOAN: Miss Streatford is in constant communication with the spirit world.

CLANDON: Are you, b'George? (*Giving it up*) Can't say I ever had much to do with spirits, though I'd a cousin was taken that way—Lady Emily Rendel.

JESSICA: Of course! I met her several times at Madame Ayot's in Knightsbridge.

CLANDON: Then I wish you'd get in touch with her spirit and ask where the devil she put a cookery book called "What To Do With a Vegetable Marrow." My wife lent it to her just before she died.

JESSICA: I could try, but it may be rather difficult.

JOAN: Doesn't Lady Clandon know what to do with a vegetable marrow?

CLANDON: Except for boiling, apparently not.

JESSICA (*inspired*): She could always stuff it.

CLANDON: Ye—es, but she's apt to resent any suggestions from me.

[*From below the windows comes the sound of an object falling, followed by a sharp and angry exclamation.*]

JOAN: Robert's hit something.

CLANDON: Shall I . . . er . . .

JOAN (*waving her back*): Oh, dear, no. He expects us to ignore accidents of that kind. Do you want to see him alone?

CLANDON: If it isn't puttin' you out.

JOAN: Not a bit.

[*Robert Rawley appears in the doorway. He is a powerfully built Yorkshireman of fifty with immense vitality, who has risen from nothing to be one of the princes of industry. If you didn't know he was blind you wouldn't know—unless he was off his own territory.*]

ROBERT: Some bloody fool left a bicycle against one of the front pillars.

CLANDON: I'm afraid that was me.

ROBERT: Who are you?

JOAN: It's Lord Clandon, Robert.

ROBERT: Oh. (*He walks sure-footedly into the room.*)

CLANDON: How d'ye do, Rawley? We haven't met for . . .

ROBERT (*waving him down*): Don't get up. I'm fine thanks, and you?

CLANDON: How did you know I did get up?

ROBERT: It's customary when the host comes into the room . . .

CLANDON (*chuckling*): Or—it used to be?

ROBERT: . . . and a board creaks in front of that

couch you were sitting in when a man puts his weight on it. (*Crosses to wing chair*) Well, this is a surprise. (*Sits wing chair, pats chair next to it*) Come and sit here, please.

JESSICA: Well, then, I think I'll say—er—goodbye.

CLANDON: Oh—good-bye—good-bye.

[*Jessica exits.*]

ROBERT: Did you bring Lady Clandon?

CLANDON: She asked me to make her apologies, but she has some runner beans to string for to-night's dinner and they take rather a long time.

ROBERT (*laughs*): That's a damn good reason anyway. (*He stops and sniffs like a pointer*) The model's here. When did it come?

JOAN: About twenty minutes ago.

ROBERT (*rises*): Good. Where is it.

JOAN: On the side table.

ROBERT (*crosses unerringly to the model and runs expert fingers over its surface*): Ha! Not a bad job. Damme if they haven't forgotten to fix the weathercock!

JOAN: Perhaps they packed it inside. They may have been afraid it would break.

ROBERT: I believe you're right. There's a socket on the ridge pole.

JOAN: Yes, here it is.

[*She extracts the weathercock, wrapped in tissue paper and puts it in Robert's open palm. He moves to wing chair, taking off the wrapping.*]

ROBERT: Yes. What d'you think of that—a man bowling. Only weathercock like it in the world. (*He holds it up for inspection.*)

CLANDON: Very original, but it beats me how you knew the model was here. No one mentioned it.

[*Robert returns to the side table and fits the weathercock into its socket.*]

ROBERT: The whole room smells like a paint shop.
Have a whisky?

CLANDON: Thank you.

[*Robert goes to the drinks table and pours whisky into a glass.*]

ROBERT: Blind men see with their noses as well as their ears. (*Offers glass*) Help yourself to soda.

[*Clandon does so while Robert pours a drink for himself.*]

What do you think of my club, eh?

CLANDON (*begging the question*): Puzzles me how you got a licence to put it up.

ROBERT: I didn't. I just built it.

CLANDON: If I'd done that they'd have had me in the courts before I could turn round. Who was your architect?

ROBERT: I was.

CLANDON: Really!

ROBERT: Though I wouldn't give myself such a fancy name. (*He settles down in his chair*) I'm a practical mechanic, that's all, but ever since I was a ragged-arsed kid, mending punctures in a Leeds bicycle shop, I could shut me eyes and see the shape of things I meant to do. When my eyes were shut for me I could see them even clearer. (*He raises his glass*) Good health! I hear you're back at Marples for good.

CLANDON: Yes and no. Berkeley Square's gone for flats and looks worse than when the land mine dropped on the corner.

JOAN (*coming towards Robert and putting a hand on his shoulder*): I'm going to leave you, Robert. Lord Clandon wants a word with you alone.

ROBERT: Oh?

JOAN (*kissing his cheek*): Don't get indignant about anything, will you?

CLANDON (*rising*): I hate drivin' you away like this.
JOAN: Nonsense! We've heaps to do. Oh, Robert, Angela wired to say she's coming down by car.

ROBERT: Why should I get indignant?

JOAN: Perhaps you won't. (*She takes a step, then stops*) Kate's put the cigar box and invitation cards on the right of the side table and the lighter's on the drinks table.

ROBERT: I'll remember.

[*Jessica appears in doorway.*]

JESSICA: Lord Clandon—

JOAN: Not now, Jessica—

JESSICA: It won't take a moment. It was Lady Emily Rendel, wasn't it?

CLANDON: Emily—that's right.

JESSICA: And it was what she did with a vegetable marrow?

CLANDON: Well, that's near enough. Thank you.

[*The two Women go out.*]

ROBERT: What was that about?

CLANDON: Your sister-in-law tells me she's spiritualistic.

ROBERT: No, just dotty. The Streatfords are a dotty lot.

CLANDON: So I've always heard—

[*He replaces his empty glass on the tray.*]

ROBERT: Too much blue blood and not enough sense. Have another drink?

CLANDON: Mm! A small one.

[*With no apparent difficulty, Robert finds Clandon's glass and refills it.*]

It's uncanny how you find your way about.

ROBERT: Just memory. In my own surroundings everything's marked out in squares like a chess

board and I've an exact note of what's in each square. That's why I don't like strange bicycles on my doorstep. (*He gets himself another drink.*)

CLANDON: Very sorry about that.

ROBERT: You weren't to know. Sit down and say what you want. You didn't come here for an exhibition of blind man's buff.

CLANDON: No—I didn't. I'll be frank with you, Rawley, because you're an outspoken sort of beggar yourself. When you bought this place in forty-four I felt nothing but regret that the death of my old friend Wetherby had made it possible.

ROBERT: You were damned stand-offish, but I expected that.

CLANDON: You see, apart from feeling you were a bit of a trespasser, for which there's no justification, you'd put my back up by tryin' to buy Marples when it wasn't on the market. It seemed to me a great piece of impertinence.

ROBERT: So you said when we met in London.

CLANDON: And I think so still. But time brings changes—radical changes. We've both lost our sons in this war and, speaking for myself, I've lost a great many other things as well.

ROBERT: In plain words, you're ready to sell after all.

CLANDON: Yes—at a price—I am. The entail came to an end when my boy died and the direct line failed.

ROBERT: Quite so, and when that happened to my son I lost all interest in buying big estates. I knew you'd come back one day, but you're two years too late.

CLANDON (*nodding*): I was afraid that might be so, but you've married again and who knows—

ROBERT (*cutting in*): When Simon died I lost my ambition to make a splash.

[*There is a short pause, then.*]

CLANDON (*diffidently*): Not altogether, did you?

ROBERT (*frowning*): Eh?

CLANDON: I understand when this memorial of yours is opened on Monday you've planned a ceremony on quite a large scale—local Press, speeches, ginger beer and all the rest of it.

ROBERT: I'm not confining myself to the local Press, and there'll be plenty of whisky, if that's what worries you.

CLANDON: It isn't. I shan't be there.

ROBERT: Eh?

CLANDON: And I want to persuade you to drop the whole idea.

ROBERT: Drop it? What do you think the club was built for?

CLANDON: I don't mean the club, but the ceremony and—forgive me—all these heroics.

ROBERT: I'll see you damned first.

CLANDON: Let me put it this way. Dedicate the place not to a single individual, but to all the local lads who didn't come back.

ROBERT: Why should I?

CLANDON (*sighing*): I could give you a dozen reasons.

ROBERT: One 'ud do if it's the right one.

CLANDON: Well, perhaps I understand better than you how people round here feel. I know that all of us have our blind spots . . . (*He checks himself in horror*) Forgive me, Rawley . . .

ROBERT: Never mind that, get on with it.

CLANDON: Then isn't it rather ostentatious publicity underlinin' the death of one young man in a place where fifteen lost their lives? It isn't as if your son spent his boyhood here. He wasn't even known by a soul in the district.

ROBERT: Simon was a public figure, so what's that to do with it?

CLANDON: Everything, my dear fellow. After all I

lost my son and heir, but I don't make the mistake of thinking it's any more important or tragic than the loss of, say, Vellaby, my gardener's boy, who was killed the same day.

ROBERT: I don't get your logic, Clandon. I'm not stopping you putting up a memorial.

CLANDON: If I had a million I wouldn't dream of doin' so.

ROBERT: That's your affair, this is mine.

CLANDON: I would have said you were making it everyone's affair. You're rammin' his death down our throats as if it was something unique rather than the common lot of a million youngsters. Be realistic, Rawley—no one but a few near relations cares twopence about the death of Simon Rawley or Michael Clandon, and no amount of publicity in good or bad taste will alter the fact.

ROBERT (*grimly and obstinately*): With the whole of his life before him that lad was killed—the first time he went into action and when he died everything I'd worked for and planned was wiped off the slate. I've made no secret of my beginnings—I was born in a tenement house in Leeds and my father signed his name with a cross till the day he died—and I make no secret of what I'd planned, not so much for myself but for those who'd come after me. I meant to start a line, Clandon, which, in a hundred years, would rank with the highest families in the land. Why should a stray bullet wipe all that out? This fine family tree which I had planned has failed at the first branch and there'll be no other, but, by God, the name Simon Rawley isn't going to die so easily.

CLANDON (*gently*): Then it boils down to the fact that what you're doin' is more an act of defiance than anything else.

ROBERT: That's a matter of opinion.

CLANDON: And in my opinion, it's a pity to see a

courageous fellow like you preparing to make such an ass of himself.

ROBERT (*rising angrily*): Now look here, Clandon, I may have blind spots, but I see through you. Your lot's on the down-grade and you don't like it. For generations you've been tin gods around here and it goes against the grain when a mongrel like myself marches in and steals your thunder.

CLANDON: Oh, goodness, man, surely you're not so foolish as to imagine I'm jealous of what you're doing? And to talk of stealin' our thunder because you've erected this modern monstrosity in a place we've built up, stone by stone, since the Conquest, is just a lot of poppycock. I think I'd better be goin', before we say things we might regret. Good-day to you, Rawley, and no hard feelin's on either side.

ROBERT: You can speak for yourself about that. (*He moves towards the bell.*)

CLANDON: Don't bother to ring. I knew my way round this house when you were still at Leeds.

[*As he reaches the door, Robert barks.*]

ROBERT: How much do you want for that ramshackle mansion of yours?

CLANDON: It's not for sale.

[*He goes out and closes the door. Robert's indignation is mixed with a reluctant admiration as he turns to run his hands over the model.*]

ROBERT: Modern monstrosity, eh?

[*Enter Joan.*]

JOAN: What did he want?

ROBERT (*trying to be off-hand*): Hallo, love.

[*He takes a repeater watch from his pocket and holds it to his ear.*]

Time I was dressing for dinner.

[*He moves towards the door, passing her.*]

JOAN: I asked you what he wanted?

ROBERT: Nothing for you to bother your pretty head about.

JOAN: That's what you're always saying these days.

ROBERT: What do you mean by that?

[*She hesitates then says impulsively.*]

JOAN: Do you still love me, Robert?

ROBERT: Of course, I do.

JOAN: In spite of the fact that I've let you down?

ROBERT: How?

JOAN: By not being able to give you the child you wanted.

ROBERT: Have I ever reproached you for that?

JOAN: No—but we never discuss anything that matters, now.

ROBERT: That's just imagination—

JOAN: No, Robert. Ever since I told you I've watched you deliberately going back to the life you lived before you married me.

ROBERT: Nonsense! A man can't live with the dead.

JOAN: But he can try and no one could be trying harder than you are. Take this memorial—

ROBERT: That had been in my mind's eye for a long time.

JOAN: Oh, Robert, stop deceiving yourself. We were so happy once. Can't we get back to it again?

ROBERT (*embarrassed*): We're happy now, Jo.

JOAN (*fiercely*): I'm not! I can't begin to be happy with this gap widening between us. I don't want just to "get along" with you, Robert. I love you and thought you loved me, but if it was only because you wanted a child you married me, then for God's sake say so and I'll clear out and give you another chance.

ROBERT: Joan, don't start that again. That's foolish talk.

JOAN: It's the only answer if I mean nothing more to you than that.

ROBERT: You said you loved me, didn't you?

JOAN (*near to tears*): That could be my way of showing it.

[*Enter Kate.*]

KATE: Your pardon, Sir Robert, Constable Patten's below asking for a word with you.

ROBERT: What about?

KATE: To do with some doubtful character that might be prowling in the neighbourhood.

ROBERT: I'll have a chat with him, then get dressed.

[*He is clearly glad of the chance to get away.*]

JOAN: Let him wait.

ROBERT: No, it may be important.

[*He goes out. Joan looks after him in frustration.*]

JOAN (*making conversation*): Who's the doubtful character, Kate? (*But she barely listens to the reply.*)

KATE: I didn't take much notice, m'lady, but a stolen car he was driving was found abandoned near Bergen Copse and there was something about injuring a constable in Wincanton who tried to stop him.

JOAN: Kate, I've always wanted to ask you something. What was the first Lady Rawley like?

KATE: It's hard to say, reely. She was weak as water, of course. Apart from her tricks to hide Mr. Simon's goings on from the master, you'd hardly think she was reely all there. I would never have stopped if it hadn't been for the master.

JOAN: And Mr. Simon? When he was a boy, I mean?

KATE: He was always the wee swankpot—very bright on the surface, of course, but not a great deal underneath. He was terribly spoilt after he had the

rheumatic fever and thought the world belonged to him. I told him once that he was born with a paper crown on his head.

JOAN (*indicating the model*): Then what do you think of all this?

KATE: Well, it seems rather a pity, m'lady, but the master likes it.

JOAN (*hardly able to conceal her satisfaction*): I'll go and dress.

[*Kate continues with her task of puffing up the cushions after Joan has left the room.*]

KATE: It's always the same, whoever they are. I can't think why gentlemen don't seem able to keep their behinds quiet on loose covers.

[*Kate exits. The stage is empty for a moment, then Angela's voice is heard off.*]

ANGELA: Hullo, Kate!

KATE: Well, Mrs. Simon, so you've arrived. Welcome home.

ANGELA: Where's everyone?

KATE: They're upstairs dressing.

ANGELA: Come in and have a drink, Max.

[*Angela enters, followed by Kate. She is an attractive girl of twenty-six.*]

MAX (*off*): Thank you.

KATE: I'll do your unpacking while you're having it, and let them know you're here. You're in the yellow room. We're not using the top floor to save the extra.

ANGELA: Right.

[*Maxwell Oliver enters. He is a good-looking, humorous-eyed man who wears the uniform of a major in the R.A.M.C. and a row of medals starting with the M.C.*]

MAX: I say, the place does look different.

KATE: Good evening, sir.

MAX: Good evening.

[Kate exits. Angela looks round the room with a half-frown and a tiny shiver.]

ANGELA (*almost to herself*): Home!

MAX: What's it feel like?

ANGELA: Somebody else's home, but that's how it always felt. I suppose because Simon and I never had one of our own.

MAX (*coming to her*): You and I'll have one of our own.

[She turns to him and smiles lovingly.]

ANGELA: Soon?

MAX: As soon as there's a square inch in Harley Street that will hold us.

[He takes her in his arms and they kiss ardently. He releases her and holds her at arm's length.]

Nice of your in-laws to give me a chance to do that.

ANGELA: Wasn't it? But you'd better straighten your tie and have a drink. We don't want them to start guessing before we break the news. I know I need one.

[She goes to the drinks table and he follows her as she mixes the drinks.]

MAX: Nervous?

ANGELA: Horribly.

MAX: Why? I'm here.

ANGELA: That is why. I don't know how it is, but Robert's blind eyes see more than ten ordinary men's. I was always scared stiff of him. Silly, because he's a good father-in-law as they go, but ruthlessly successful men always terrify me.

MAX: So you looked round for a prospective flop and found me.

ANGELA: I don't think you'll be a flop.

MAX: Better not count on that. I come from a long line of failures.

ANGELA (*raising glass*): Good luck.

[*She sees photograph on table C., picks it up.*]

MAX: Is that Simon?

ANGELA: Yes.

MAX: He was a damned good-looking chap.

ANGELA (*flatly*): Yes—he was. (*Sees model*) Whatever's this? (*Picks up invitation card*) "You are invited to attend . . ." So that's why they wanted me back. Why didn't they say? How like Robert. I wish I hadn't come. (*Gives him the card.*)

MAX (*looking at invitation card*): They wanted you here for the ceremony?

ANGELA (*nods*): It would have seemed rather heartless, I suppose, if the young widow hadn't been present. It'll seem even more so when she tells them why she did come.

MAX: We've no cause to be ashamed of the reason.

ANGELA: I'm not ashamed. Forget it. I'll be all right in a minute. Look, you'd better go back to Marples for dinner and come in afterwards when I've tested the ground a bit.

MAX: Why?

ANGELA: Because it isn't going to be so easy to tell him now.

MAX: You're a free woman, Angela; you can do what you like with your life.

ANGELA: I know, but I'd rather tackle this without being bolstered up from outside.

[*He looks at her for a moment and there is a hint of pain in his expression.*]

MAX: I've been afraid of this.

ANGELA: Of what?

MAX: The effect coming home would have on you. Out there, away from old associations, you could forget. But now—

ANGELA: You're wrong, Max. It isn't that.

MAX: Yes, it is, and was more or less bound to be. I adore you and know you love me, but I'm not such a fool as to imagine one man can step into another man's shoes—

ANGELA (*violently*): Don't talk like that, Max.

MAX: But, darling, believe me, I realise—

ANGELA: Don't talk like that or you'll have me saying things I never want to say. Run along now and come back after dinner.

[*He hesitates, takes a few steps towards the door, then turns.*]

MAX: No. I've got to get this off my chest. We've never talked much about Simon. I've never liked to—nor have you. I'm grateful, for you've never once let me feel I'm a rebound.

ANGELA: I've never wanted to.

MAX: Well, perhaps I am and perhaps not, but it's only natural to be afraid of it.

[*Angela jumps suddenly to her feet.*]

ANGELA: Max, stop it!

MAX: You'll do neither of us any good by deceiving yourself. A ghost can be just as strong a rival as a living man. Love doesn't die when people die. We bury it alive as often as not.

ANGELA: I've told you I love you, haven't I? I'm ready to spend the rest of my life with you? Doesn't that speak for itself? Have I ever made comparisons or asked you to step into Simon's shoes?

MAX: No, my darling, but—

ANGELA: Then stop being humble. I don't want second-best or anyone who thinks he's second-best.

I chose you because I love you and if you ever dare to speak of yourself again as some sort of substitute, I'll . . .

[Her voice cracks and she moves away. He comes to her quickly and turns her round to face him.]

MAX: I'd die if I ever lost you.

[Impulsively and half-crying, she throws her arms round his neck and kisses him passionately.]

ANGELA: Oh, you fool! Do you think these last six months have been an act? Have I behaved like a woman who needed a man—any man—just because she's used to having one around? You're not filling a gap in my heart, Max, you've carved your own place there—deep, deep down. Remember that please, and never speak of this again.

[He looks down at her and seems younger and very happy.]

MAX: Those were the loveliest words I ever heard.

ANGELA: I'm bitterly ashamed of having had to say them.

[Joan enters. She seems surprised to see them standing close together. Angela comes forward and the two exchange a formal kiss.]

JOAN: How are you, Angela? You look heaps better than when last I saw you.

ANGELA: I am. You don't know each other. Maxwell Oliver—Lady Rawley.

MAX: How do you do?

JOAN *(shaking hands)*: You must be Lord Clandon's nephew.

ANGELA: Yes, he is. We came over from Germany together and he drove me from town.

JOAN: Fine. *(To Max)* Your uncle was here this afternoon, Major Oliver.

MAX: And I expect he's wondering what the devil's become of me.

JOAN: Won't you stop to dinner? For a wonder there's plenty.

MAX: I can't, thanks. But Angela's asked me round afterwards if I may come.

JOAN (*looking from one to the other*): Do—of course.

MAX: Thanks. Later on, then.

[*He goes out.*]

JOAN: He's nice looking.

ANGELA: I think so. (*She points at the model*) So that's why you sent for me.

JOAN: Yes. I know you haven't like being here since Simon was killed, but I did think—

ANGELA: That Robert would expect me to come.

JOAN: Yes.

ANGELA: All this would have given Simon a good laugh anyway.

JOAN: Would it? Robert went out to Normandy to visit his grave last June.

ANGELA: Oh! Is he nicely buried?

JOAN: Yes. There's a German grave ten yards away with no flowers growing on it.

ANGELA: That's rather sad.

[*There's an awkward pause.*]

JOAN: Angela, treat Robert gently.

ANGELA: How do you mean?

JOAN: We all have different ways of getting over things. Yours is to turn your back on them. Robert's is to keep them with him. He won't let himself forget and finds it hard to see anybody else's point of view.

ANGELA (*quoting*): "He died but his memory shall live." That word "shall" tells everything, doesn't it?

JOAN: Just about. I know how you felt and feel

much the same myself. Perpetual mourning's as out of date as plumes on 'a hearse, but I thought I'd warn you. (*She gives Angela a friendly smile*) Are you happy, or happier?

ANGELA: I'm happy. Are you?

JOAN: I wish I could do more for Robert.

ANGELA: Such as?

[*Joan does not answer because Robert comes into the room.*]

ANGELA: Hallo, Robert.

ROBERT: So you've come home?

ANGELA: Yes, here I am. (*She goes over to him and kisses his cheek*) How are you?

ROBERT: My health's all right. (*He goes to his chair and sits*) Who drove away in a car?

ANGELA: Maxwell Oliver.

JOAN: He drove Angela down from London. They met in Berlin, Robert.

ROBERT: Did they? Does he know his uncle wants to sell Marples to me?

JOAN (*startled*): Does he?

ROBERT: Yes, and no. (*He taps the adjoining chair*) Sit down. You make me uncomfortable moving about like that.

[*Angela sits.*]

You know what's happening on Monday?

ANGELA: Yes, Joan has told me.

ROBERT: I didn't write myself, because you seemed to have lost interest in us.

ANGELA: I couldn't see the use of hanging about here when there was work to be done.

ROBERT: Feeding bloody Germans.

ANGELA: Others too.

ROBERT: Well, it's your life.

ANGELA: Yes, it's my life.

ROBERT: Have you been to see your husband's grave?

ANGELA: No, I don't like graves very much.

ROBERT: He dug his own, y'know. He was buried in the trench he died in.

ANGELA: Was he?

ROBERT: I don't like graves, either—least of all that one, but I'll be there every year on the twelfth of June, until I'm too old to be carried. (*His voice is steady, but there is an underlying throb of emotion*) You wouldn't look on that as natural homage, I suppose?

ANGELA: One needn't visit a graveyard to respect the dead.

ROBERT: That's a lawyer's answer, it doesn't come from the heart.

ANGELA: You can't alter people's hearts. They are what they are for better or worse.

[*The talk is plainly telling on her nerves and she gets up to escape from it.*]

ROBERT: I wonder you have it in your heart to be with us this week-end.

ANGELA: I wanted to come because I had something to tell you—about myself.

JOAN (*quickly*): Leave it till later, Angela. It's nearly dinner time and if you want to wash—

ANGELA (*relaxing*): Perhaps you're right. I feel a bit travel-stained.

ROBERT: What is this secret?

ANGELA: It isn't a secret or I wouldn't be telling it. I won't be long.

JOAN: Don't bother to change if you'd rather not.

ANGELA: I'd like to.

[*She goes out. There is a short silence, then Joan speaks.*]

JOAN: Did he really offer to sell Marples?

ROBERT: Yes. But that wasn't the main purpose of his visit.

JOAN (*unwarily*): Something to do with his nephew?

ROBERT: No, why should it be?

JOAN: I only wondered.

ROBERT: He wanted me to drop the memorial.

[*Joan looks startled.*]

He can't afford to do the same for his boy and it rankles that anyone else can.

JOAN: I'm sure that wasn't his reason.

ROBERT: Oh, he covered it with a lot of guff about bad taste and being wrong to glorify one man's death among so many. Did you ever hear such damned cheek?

JOAN: No, I wouldn't call it cheek. If that was his honest opinion he was right to express it.

ROBERT: You'll be saying next it's your opinion, too.

JOAN: It is. I suppose because Simon wasn't my son you never asked me what I thought.

ROBERT: Then, let's hear it now.

JOAN: All right, you shall. I agree with Lord Clandon and with lots of other local people who find themselves "regretfully unable to attend the opening ceremony."

ROBERT: Much I care if they come or not.

JOAN: But you do care or you wouldn't be doing it this way.

ROBERT: What way?

JOAN: Publicly, on cream-laid invitation cards with black edges. I don't believe you've given a thought to the good this club may be to the village. All you want is to make a film star saint of a man they didn't even know by sight.

ROBERT: How dare you speak of the dead in that fashion?

JOAN (*emotionally*): Because I can't bear seeing you

become a laughing stock. You mean as much to me as Simon did to you.

ROBERT: It doesn't seem so.

JOAN: Oh, Robert, don't dig in your toes like a mule. Try for once to see the other side—my side. Simon died, I'm sure, bravely, but like hundreds of others. To pick him out from all the rest is to—so vulgar.

ROBERT (*grimly*): I see. There's only one excuse I can find for you to speak that way—you've never had a child and can't understand the feelings of those who have.

JOAN (*whipped to fury by his words*): If that's what you think, go ahead with your tin-pot memorial. But don't expect me at the opening ceremony or here—any longer than it takes to find somewhere else to go.

ROBERT (*trembling with anger*): Modern monstrosity! Tin-pot memorial!

[*Kate enters.*]

KATE: Dinner is served, m'lady.

[*Kate goes, leaving the door open.*]

ROBERT: You and Clandon seem to have got together over this. Well, if you're not too busy packing after dinner, ring up Clyde of *The Times* and tell him I'm putting aside five hundred thousand pounds to erect Simon Rawley Memorial Clubs in all parts of the country. (*He walks towards the door.*)

JOAN (*angry to the verge of tears*): Why wait till after dinner? I'll do it now.

ROBERT: Good idea—why not?

[*Robert hesitates a moment then goes out. Joan snatches a private telephone directory, glances at it and picks up the receiver.*]

JOAN: I want a London call, please. Central two thousand. [*Curtain.*]

ACT TWO

Scene II

ONE HOUR LATER.

The curtains have been drawn and lights are on. Kate is discovered at the drinks table, changing used glasses for clean ones. This done, she crosses to door with used glasses, switches off lights, and exits, closing door.

The stage is empty for a few moments, then from behind the curtains, a slight noise is heard—the curtains part and a man's head appears. Satisfied there is no one about, he comes into the room, moves to door, opens it, listens, then closes it and switches on lights. This is Simon Rawley, and his appearance is far from heroic. His chin is unshaven and his right cheek is marked with a long jagged scar. His hair wants cutting and brushing. His clothes consist of any old garment picked up on his travels. Clearly he is a complete down and out, but when fear, which is his constant companion, steps aside he can still summon up the ghost of the easy insolent charm that was once his stock-in-trade. A ready cynicism has not rusted with time, but long contact with profane and degraded men has lent a coarseness to his speech, startling even in these outspoken days. He glances round the room and breathing jerkily, pounces on the whisky decanter and splashes four fingers of the spirit in a glass, draining it at a gulp. He puts the decanter down in a different place on the tray and moves to wing chair. He picks up the photograph of himself, shrugs, replaces it, then flops exhaustedly in the wing chair, closing his eyes while the warmth of the spirit brings comfort and relief.

The door opens quietly and Robert comes in. Caught unaware, Simon starts and stiffens, then casts a frightened look towards the window.

ROBERT (*throwing up his head*): Who's there?

[*Simon half opens his mouth, but dares not speak.*]

Who's there, I said?

[*He listens, his head slightly on one side, frowning and puzzled. He sniffs the air as if scenting something.*]

Funny.

[*Dismissing the idea that anybody is in the room, he crosses to the side table, passing within a few inches of Simon. At the side table; he feels for the cigar box and takes a cigar, then reaches out a caressing hand to the model.*]

We'll show'em, Simon.

[*Simon, who was edging inch by inch towards the window, freezes at the sound of his name. Robert goes up to the drinks table for the lighter and is lighting his cigar when Joan enters.*]

JOAN: Robert, I must talk—

[*She sees Simon, stops dead and a hand flies to her mouth to smother a cry of amazement. With terror in his eyes, Simon frantically signals her to be quiet. Robert swings round.*]

ROBERT: What's the matter?

JOAN: Nothing.

ROBERT: Then why did you scream?

JOAN: I turned my ankle, that's all.

ROBERT: When I came in just now I'd a feeling someone was in the room.

[*Again Simon makes a gesture of supplication.*]

JOAN: A ghost, perhaps.

ROBERT: Don't you start that Jessica rubbish. One's enough. (*He moves towards the door*) I'm going out.

JOAN: For long?

ROBERT: I don't know. There's nothing much to stay in for. I shall walk to the bridge. The sound of running water will be pleasanter than a lot of things I've heard to-night.

JOAN: Put on your coat or you may catch cold.

[*At the door Robert turns.*]

ROBERT: What were you going to say just now?

JOAN: It'll keep.

ROBERT: Many things we said to-night would have been better kept. Did you mean that you won't be here when—

JOAN (*with a hint of panic*): Robert, I can't talk to you now. Leave me alone, please.

ROBERT (*angrily*): Oh, very well, if that's how you feel about it!

[*Bitterly hurt, he goes out, closing the door behind him. Joan moves there quickly and turns the key in the lock. Then she turns to look at Simon who gives a sigh of relief.*]

SIMON: That was superb, Joanie. Do you deceive him as successfully in other ways?

JOAN (*with a negative gesture*): I don't know what any of this means. I can't think straight.

SIMON: I'm not a ghost.

JOAN: You look like one—and those awful clothes. What does it mean, Simon?

SIMON: What you see, I suppose. I've come home.

[*He drops into his father's chair wearily.*]

JOAN: But you were dead. They told us so. Killed outside Caen. If you were alive all this time we should have known. You would have told us. Simon, don't sit there nodding. You've got to tell me what this means.

SIMON: Everyone doesn't have to be killed in a war. Some of us come through—and I have.

JOAN: That scar—you were wounded—taken prisoner—lost your memory—

SIMON: That's far too thin for anyone to swallow. Look, I'm starving. Get me something to eat.

JOAN (*with gathering suspicion*): Not until you tell me what you're trying to hide.

SIMON: I'm hiding nothing. (*He gets up and pours himself another drink*) I'm not the stuff heroes are made of. I was too young to die so I didn't.

JOAN (*flatly*): You deserted.

SIMON: Um!

[*Joan looks from him to the model and begins to laugh like the sound of a cracked bell.*]

What's the joke?

JOAN (*she quotes*): "He died, but his memory shall live"—"stink" should be the word.

SIMON: Don't go all patriotic on me. It's easy to be brave for other people. And I wasn't the only one to cut loose. There are thousands of us, if you want to know.

JOAN: How comforting! Did all of them arrange for their personal belongings to be sent home like yours were?

SIMON: Use your loaf. If you're going to desert you might as well do it intelligently. It's no joke when half the police in Europe have your name and description to help 'em find you.

JOAN: Haven't they yours?

SIMON: No. No, that was the one bright spot.

JOAN: What do you mean?

SIMON (*flopping into his father's chair*): About a dozen of us were detailed for a recce. job—and it was plain murder. The dear old R.A.F. bombed us for one hour, then the Germans piped up with three hours' shelling. If anything was needed to convince me of the stupidity of war those four hours did it. Then the poor basket I shared a slit trench

with had his head blown off which completed my conversion. So I stripped him of all his identification junk, shoved my little lot in his pocket and beat a strategic retreat. It was a case of one man losing his head and another keeping it.

JOAN: You were always good at passing the buck. Then what?

SIMON: I hid up with a little French tart for several months.

JOAN: As a pimp, I suppose?

SIMON: She was very fond of me.

JOAN: Did she know who you were?

SIMON: It wasn't my name she was interested in. She knew what she wanted and got it. We might have been together still if some crazy Frenchman, back from a concentration camp, hadn't denounced her as a collaborator—as if a tart wouldn't be! Not content with that, he stuck a pair of scissors down her throat while the locals were shaving off her hair.

JOAN: Why did you wait all this time before coming here?

SIMON: No option. At first I hoped to get direct to South America from Marseilles and waited months down there, but our little lot got broken up and those of us who got away had to lie low and make other plans. Then it wasn't as easy as you might think to get home. I've only been back a month and a hell of a month it's been. England's no cop for a man without papers. Now about that food? I'm starving for it.

JOAN: Ring the bell and ask for some. Think how delighted they'll be to see you—their hero. (*She goes to the window and speaks with her back to him*) Why didn't that Frenchman stick his scissors into you?

SIMON (*fingering the scar*): He did—though I like to give the impression that this was a war wound. Even deserters have their pride.

[*She turns, a little calmer.*]

JOAN: Pride—but no heart. Is that it? Have you ever given a thought to your father or Angela since you ran away?

SIMON (*with a flash of resentment*): Of course, I've thought of them! But what the bloody hell could I do? Send 'em a wire saying "Not dead, deserted"? (*He rises and his hands work nervously*) What do you know about my heart? What do you know about how it feels to be spattered all over with somebody else's blood and brains? (*His voice pitches high and protesting*) I know! I know! A thousand dead heroes are better than one live coward. All right, I am a coward, but I'm alive and that's how I meant it to be.

JOAN: It may be what you meant, but to me you're as dead as ever you were. An hour ago I would have given almost anything to know that this was going to happen. Your memory hasn't been an easy one to live with, Simon.

SIMON: Then you should be grateful to me for coming back.

JOAN: In a funny way, I am. At least it's knocked down all the shams about you. But you're still dead, Simon, because however happy it might make me, Robert must never learn the truth.

SIMON: Ah, nuts! Don't kid yourself I'm staying dead for no better reason than to give the old man the satisfaction of talking a lot of bull about me. I've my own interests to think about.

JOAN (*with a threat in her voice*): You'll stay dead, because you've no choice. If you've anything to say you'll say it to me.

SIMON: Won't that be nice! I'm afraid all this solicitude for father's feelings doesn't wash. In the brief sample you gave me, you two seem to be getting on like a house on fire—just before the roof falls in.

JOAN: If through any word of yours he finds out you're alive, I shall send for the police.

SIMON: He'd never let you. He's far too jealous of his good name to risk losing it through me.

JOAN: I mean it, Simon.

SIMON (*ironically*): No!

JOAN: All right, call him and see. Go to the window and shout for him now.

SIMON (*sizing her up*): I believe you do mean it!

JOAN: How much will you take to clear out and never come back?

SIMON: How much have you got? No, don't answer that. I'm not milking you. This is father's pigeon, not yours. He ought to be glad to do it. It was I who put him on the map. If I hadn't knocked up a few spectacular centuries, no one outside the motor trade would have looked at him.

JOAN: What a little swine you are!

SIMON: Sorry, Joanie, but I'm not impressed by this touching picture of the old man conformed in his anguish by my reflected glory. He's hard as nails and you know it.

JOAN (*pointing behind him*): Look at that model, Simon.

SIMON (*with a casual over-shoulder glance*): The doll's house, d'you mean? Don't tell me you're furnishing a nursery?

JOAN: Go and look at it.

[*But instead he goes up stage for another drink.*]

SIMON: Do you honestly mean you are fond of the old man? When I read in the paper that you'd married him I laughed like a drain. "Blind motor magnate marries perfect secretary." And that bit about still wearing a mourning band for me. (*He takes a pull at his drink*) I suppose you'd planned to hook him for years. Was that why you'd never go to bed with me? I always felt you wanted to, but

could never make out why you didn't. (*He puts down the glass and strolls over to the model.*)

JOAN (*in a low voice*): If I told you, you probably wouldn't believe me.

SIMON: No? Well, I'm a disbelieving sort of guy (*He breaks off as he examines the model*) Goodness gracious! What is all this?

JOAN: A pavilion and a playing field are being presented to the village on Monday next. That's the model.

SIMON: You know, it's really rather touching. I feel quite chokey.

JOAN: There are going to be others all over the country. He's spending half a million to keep your memory bright. Now do you see why he must never learn the truth?

[*Simon is silent for a while, then he turns with a slow smile.*]

SIMON: On the contrary, only now do I begin to see the possibilities of the situation and you sit there and ask me to stay dead! Either you're crazy or are getting a very juicy rake-off from the contractors. In my wildest dreams I never imagined touching him for more than a pittance—but now! My resurrection may be a shock to the poor devil, but look at the money I'll save him.

[*In his excitement he has forgotten his weariness and seems younger and fresher as he crosses the room almost to the door.*]

JOAN: I've warned you, Simon.

SIMON (*following his own line of thought*): It all works out perfectly. We both want the same thing—to keep Simon Rawley dead but happy. It's only in our way of doing it we differ.

[He is standing by the door when the handle is turned, then rattled. Simon catches his breath and cringes in alarm.]

(In a terrified whisper) Who's that ? Is it him ?

JOAN: Who is it ?

KATE *(off-stage)*: Me m'lady, Kate. I've brought you some coffee, but the door seems to have stuck.

JOAN: No, I locked it. I won't have any coffee, thanks.

KATE *(off stage)*: Are you all right, m'lady ?

JOAN: Yes, yes, quite all right. I didn't want to be disturbed that's all.

KATE *(off-stage)*: Very well, m'lady.

[Simon slowly relaxes and gives a little sigh. Joan nods at him contemptuously.]

JOAN: If you really meant to see Robert, you don't seem very anxious to face him.

SIMON: I was startled, that's all.

JOAN: No, you were scared—just as you were when he came in after dinner. Why didn't you speak to him then, Simon ? You had the chance.

SIMON: I don't know. The shock might have been too much for him and I hadn't made up my mind what to say.

JOAN: After all this time ? And after taking all the trouble to come here ? Isn't that a bit thin ? Why not admit you were scared out of your wits ?

SIMON: Oh, shut up!

[He turns away.]

JOAN *(going on in the same voice)*: And you haven't your mother to run to any longer.

SIMON: You leave Mother out of this. She was the best friend I ever had.

JOAN: She was the worst. If she hadn't stood be-

tween you and what was coming to you, you might have been a man instead of—what you are.

SIMON (*swinging round on her*): Have you finished?

JOAN: No.

SIMON: Oh!

[*He flops on to the couch.*]

JOAN: Ever since I saw you lounging through the outer office in a camel hair coat with a club scarf wound three times round your silly neck, I said to myself, "if ever there was a bounder, there he goes."

SIMON: A good thing you said it to yourself or you might have lost your job.

JOAN (*smiling reminiscently*): And that noisy little sports car you drove, with your hair blowing about like a girl's in a seaside poster.

SIMON: I seem to have attracted a lot of attention.

JOAN: You did. There was the hell of a flutter at the works when the chief's playboy son paid us a visit. You never did anything else but attract attention. Even when you were supposed to be dead you were still in the window. (*The contempt in her voice turns to angry resentment*) And the hell of it, is unless Robert's heart's to be broken, it'll go on that way—and on. Alive or dead, you'll never leave us in peace.

SIMON (*his face puckering with self-pity*): How much peace do you think I've known these last two years? Can't you see that's what I'm longing for?

JOAN: You'll never find it, Simon. There's no way out of your trouble or mine. If I were you I'd kill myself.

SIMON: Oh, would you? No such luck, Joanie. I'm not polishing myself off for you or anyone else. Look, what's happened to my clothes?

JOAN: They're in the room which was to have been yours. It's been left untouched since we had the tragic news of your death! There's nobody on that

floor. (*She crosses to the smaller door*) You'd better use these stairs. It's the first on the right along the passage.

SIMON: This is a charming house father bought me. I should have been very happy living here. Ah, well, I suppose that's the penalty of being more dead than alive. First on the right, you said?

JOAN: Yes, but pull the curtains before you put on the light.

SIMON: Thanks for the tip. You might have been hiding men for years. Perhaps you have. Oh, by the way—where's Angela?

JOAN: Germany.

SIMON: How did she take my death?

JOAN: Rather hard, I think.

SIMON: Did she? Oh! But I'm disappointed in you, though. I'd pictured tear-stained pillows on my account. Never can tell, can you? (*Again he takes a step through the door, but turns with an afterthought*) Not still thinking of calling the police, are you?

JOAN: That depends on you.

SIMON: A lot depends on me—and don't forget that food.

[*He smiles and goes out, closing the door. Joan presses her hands to her eyes, thinks a moment, crosses and picks up the telephone receiver.*]

JOAN: I want a London call, please. Central two thousand.

[*The door opens and Simon peeps through.*]

SIMON: Joanie, you wouldn't be—

JOAN: No, I wouldn't.

SIMON: I only wondered.

[*But he lingers until her call comes through.*]

JOAN: Hallo. Is that *The Times*? May I speak to Mr. Clyde, please?

[Reassured, Simon retires and closes the door. Joan waits, nervously tapping the table top with a fingernail.]

What ? Oh, dear, isn't he ? Yes, perhaps you could. This is Lady Rawley. I rang earlier this evening to tell him about a bequest my husband is making, but will you ask Mr. Clyde to hold up the news until he hears from us again ?

[Outside the door is the sound of voices, then the door handle is rattled.]

Hold on, will you ? *(Then, speaking over her shoulder)* Wait a minute, please. *(Into telephone again)* Yes, nothing must be printed yet.

ANGELA *(off-stage)*: Joan, are you all right ?

JOAN *(calling)*: Yes, I'm all right. I won't be a second. *(Into telephone)* Thank you. I'm so grateful. Good-bye.

[She hangs up, hurries to the door and unlocks it, admitting Angela who is followed by Max, now wearing a dinner jacket.]

Angela, I—Oh!

[She sees Max, flickers a smile and stands back for them to come in.]

ANGELA: Why did you lock the door ?

JOAN: To keep people out.

MAX: What a good answer.

JOAN: You must think me very rude and peculiar.

MAX: Not at all. They're your doors and what's the good of a lock if you don't use it ?

JOAN: Would you think me even ruder if I asked you to have a cigarette in the garden ?

MAX: Both of us, or just me ?

JOAN: Just you.

MAX *(agreeably)*: All right. Here I go.

ANGELA: No, don't. (*To Joan*) You can say anything you like before Max.

JOAN: I'm sure I can, but about this I'd rather not if you don't mind.

ANGELA: But I do mind. We've no secrets from each other and whatever you say to me—

MAX (*cutting in*): Don't let's be difficult, Angela. If she wants a word with you alone, let her have it. Give me a shout when you're through.

[*He gives them both a friendly smile and goes out.*]

JOAN: He's all right, that friend of yours. Is it serious?

ANGELA (*with a slight air of resentment and wariness*): Yes.

JOAN: I was afraid so.

ANGELA: You needn't be. We shan't say anything about ourselves until after Monday.

[*There is a short silence.*]

JOAN: Angela, I want to talk to you about something that means a great deal to all of us.

ANGELA: Go ahead.

JOAN: Have you got over Simon yet?

ANGELA: Why do you ask?

JOAN: Have you?

ANGELA (*slowly*): No. I shall never quite get over Simon. There'll always be a scar of sorts.

JOAN (*starts a little at the word "scar", then composes herself*): Then you loved him very much?

ANGELA (*coldly and distinctly*): I loathed him.

[*Joan starts.*]

I'm sorry if that offends you, but you weren't his wife. You asked for the truth and you've got it.

JOAN (*rather urgently*): But is it the truth?

ANGELA: Why should I tell you a lie?

JOAN: Robert said you cried all night when the telegram came.

ANGELA: People do cry at miracles.

JOAN (*with a touch of reproach*): Oh, Angela!

ANGELA (*warmly*): I'm sorry again, but I'm no good at humbug. Simon was Robert's ideal, but he wasn't mine. To Robert, Simon was the paragon of all the virtues—but not to me. That's why I left here, so as not to shatter his illusions. Over there I met Max and fell in love—really in love.

JOAN: Then you've no regret?

ANGELA: None.

JOAN: Suppose Simon hadn't been killed and came back into your life—

ANGELA: I should want to die.

[*The smaller door opens and Simon comes in. His face twitches and there is a bitter edge to his voice.*]

SIMON: Famous last words!

[*Stunned, Angela takes two or three steps forward.*]

ANGELA: Simon! No . . . no . . .

[*Curtain.*]

ACT II

THE SAME.

THE ACTION IS CONTINUOUS.

Simon is still standing at the door L. Angela looks at him, horrified.

SIMON: Awkward things, miracles! You bloody little prig. Celebrated my death by falling in love, did you? Who's the lucky man? I'd like to meet him.

ANGELA (*barely audible*): Max—get Max to come up.

[*Joan moves to window U.R., parts curtains and calls down quietly.*]

JOAN: Major Oliver, come up, will you?

MAX (*off*): Right.

SIMON: Maxwell Oliver? Clandon's nephew? I say, I say, you are going it!

JOAN: Must you make things worse for her?

SIMON: You should have told me she was here instead of all that nonsense about Germany!

[*We hear quick footsteps and Max comes in U.R.*]

MAX (*cheerfully*): Well, are you through?

ANGELA: Max—

MAX: What's wrong?

ANGELA: Max—he—he—

[*But she can't go on. Max looks across at Simon, frowns a puzzled frown, and becomes rigid.*]

MAX (*softly*): It can't be!

SIMON: You seem to know me by sight. I only know you by name.

MAX: We believed you were dead.

SIMON: No need to apologise. I gather you and Angela are very close friends.

MAX: Angela married me in Berlin a month ago.

[Joan turns with a gasp to look at him.]

SIMON (*taking it in slowly*): She what?

[Then he looks from one to the other and starts to shake with silent laughter.]

MAX (*with gathering fury*): What's so funny, Rawley? Why couldn't you tell her you were alive?

JOAN: He's a deserter, that's why.

MAX: I see—

[Suddenly his temper passes out of all control and he slaps Simon in the face with the front and back of his hand. Simon topples back into a chair, gasping. Max reaches out to drag him to his feet. Joan comes running forward, crying urgently:]

JOAN: No! No!

MAX: Get up! Get up!

JOAN (*urgently*): Don't please . . . please. Robert mustn't know—and if anyone heard . . .

MAX (*relaxing*): Sorry.

[He turns away from Simon and looks at Angela, who has not moved. He repeats his apology to her.]

I'm sorry, Angela.

ANGELA: If you hadn't done it, I should.

MAX (*realising the implication*): So that's how it is.

[Angela looks at Simon with a mixture of pity and contempt.]

ANGELA: That's how it always was.

MAX: Now we're getting somewhere.

SIMON: You won't get far on that line, Oliver. (*He produces a smile*) Thanks, Joanie. How about one more service—getting me a bite of food? Even he (*nodding at Max*) doesn't want me to die of starvation. It 'ud be too slow, wouldn't it?

[Max turns aside to Angela.]

JOAN: I'll see what I can do. (*To Angela*) Keep a look out for Robert or Jessica.

ANGELA: I will.

[*Joan goes out. Angela moves to one of the windows, draws back a curtain and stands silhouetted against the night. Max stands near her.*]

(*Quietly*) I nearly told you earlier to-night, but I was trying to forget how ashamed I was of him.

MAX: That's all right, darling. You've laid a very frightening ghost.

[*Simon rises.*]

SIMON: I'll have a drink while the post-mortem is going on.

MAX: Speaking as a doctor, I wouldn't. On an empty stomach it'll make you sick.

SIMON: I'll risk that. It's so long since I've been within reach of a decanter I feel like letting myself go. (*He pours another drink*) But you're right about the empty stomach. Things haven't been so good lately. Had my ration book pinched and the gent I bought it from has gone to quod.

MAX: Dear, dear—You're breaking my heart.

SIMON: I may do that yet.

[*He empties his glass and is rapidly regaining confidence under the influence of the whisky. Max is looking at him critically.*]

You're a bit too cocksure, Oliver, and I resent it. You're wondering how to get yourself out of a mess and me into one. My advice is: Don't try. I've a fair experience of getting out of tight corners and putting other people into 'em.

MAX: Your deeds in battle prove that.

SIMON: Very funny, but when I've a bit of grub inside me you may find me talking back in a way you won't like. (*He flops wearily into a chair and*

passes a hand across his eyes) That's what I need—food. On my way here I had a blackout and nearly landed the car in a quarry. (*He looks up at them*) Go on—say you're sorry I didn't.

MAX: Whose car?

SIMON: I didn't wait to ask the owner's name.

MAX (*laughing lightly*): You fellows inherit the earth. Free motoring—no income tax—everything laid on—including blackouts.

SIMON: You might not think they're so funny if you had one.

MAX (*looking at him closely*): I shouldn't. Have you had many?

SIMON: One or two.

MAX: Hm!

SIMON (*looking up*): What do you mean—"Hm!"?

MAX: Have you been eating blackberries?

SIMON: Eating what?

MAX: But of course it's the wrong time of the year. (*Off handedly*) I was wondering why you were so blue round the mouth. Perhaps only going out at night accounts for it.

SIMON: What the hell are you getting at?

MAX (*indifferently*): Or is it Athlete's heart? You did a lot of running between wickets in the old days—and seem to have done a fair amount since.

[*Simon glares at him with a mixture of resentment and anxiety.*]

SIMON (*nervously*): What do you mean—blue? If you'd been through what I have you wouldn't be looking too rosy.

MAX: Beats me how you found the courage to stand it.

SIMON (*stridently*): Angela must think you're the helluva fellow picking on a sick man as a punching bag. It's a fine way for a doctor to behave.

MAX: I was having a night off from doctoring, but

if you want to be treated as a patient I'm game.
(*He comes downstage*) You say you're sick. Have you seen anyone about it?

SIMON: Oh, I've lived in consulting rooms. You damn fool! You leave my health alone, doctor. I'll give you plenty of other things to think about.

MAX: As you please. It's only that being used to the idea that you were dead I'm naturally interested to know how much alive you are.

SIMON: There's nothing wrong with me that rest and a bit of feeding up won't put right.

MAX: I haven't denied it. For all I know you're as fit as a sewer rat, who does uncommonly well in very similar conditions—but then I *don't* know.

SIMON: If that's an offer to go over me with a stethoscope you know what you can do with it.

MAX: All I said was that you looked rather blue—here.

[*He touches the area round his own mouth. Simon throws Max a venomous look then examines his reflection in the wall mirror.*]

See what I mean?

SIMON: Who wouldn't look blue with a two-day growth and this scar as an ornament?

MAX: To say nothing of the dirt. You've never had any serious illness I suppose?

SIMON: No, I haven't.

ANGELA (*suddenly*): He had rheumatic fever as a boy.

MAX (*slowly*): Did he? Then there we are.

SIMON: There we are my foot. I got over it.

MAX: Did you?

SIMON: They wouldn't have passed me fit for general service if I hadn't. And don't say they might have missed it, because I told the M.O. myself.

MAX (*laughing*): I'll bet you did, but it was a mis-

take. We're wary of heart stories from bashful conscripts. But these valvular murmurs have funny habits. At times they are nice and quiet, then they'll blaze up suddenly.

SIMON: How do you mean—suddenly?

MAX (*simply*): Suddenly.

SIMON: Are you trying to scare me?

MAX: Scaring yourself, aren't you?

SIMON: I'm not in love with cracks about my health. And don't pin too many hopes on my early death. I'm living a long time yet.

MAX: Hadn't you better touch wood? There are lots of ways of dying, Rawley, and lots of people would welcome the chance of showing you a few. Come to think of it, if I were you, I would be rather scared.

SIMON (*his voice rising shrilly*): Angela, tell this fancy man of yours to watch his step or—

[*Max grips Simon's arm and swings him round.*]

MAX: Don't talk to Angela while I'm about or I might forget my bedside manner again!

SIMON: I've more legal right to talk to her than you have.

[*Simon between chairs C., sits chair C.*]

MAX: That's one of the reasons I'd be scared. (*Leans over back of chair*) But now let's get down to it. How much do you want and what do you offer in return?

SIMON: Now you're talking, but, in justice to all parties, we'll go into figures after I've had some grub.

ANGELA: Max, go and see if Joan needs any help.

MAX: Why? She'll be along.

ANGELA: Please, Max. I shall be all right.

[*Max hesitates, frowning.*]

SIMON: Can't you see *our* wife wants to be alone with me? If it's any comfort, I never make passes before meals and just now I'd rather have a mutton chop than any woman in the world.

[*Max makes a move towards him, but is stopped by Angela, who puts a hand on his arm. Max goes out, closing door.*]

ANGELA: I wanted to speak to you alone, because—

SIMON: Wait—before you get under weigh there are one or two things I'd like to get straight.

ANGELA: All right, but hurry. (*Goes to window*) Robert may be back any minute.

SIMON: How much did I cut up for when I died?

[*Angela comes D.R., sits couch.*]

ANGELA: Debts of over five thousand pounds—which swallowed up the whole of your life insurance.

SIMON: Pity! What have you been living on since?

ANGELA: My salary and private income.

SIMON: Oh, yes, of course, Granny's three-fifty a year which I could never get at.

ANGELA: Robert has been making me an allowance of fifteen hundred a year free of tax.

SIMON: Has he, by jove!

ANGELA: Which I'd have refused if I could have done so without hurting his feelings.

SIMON: Why? The idea that you were getting it because you'd been my wife?

ANGELA: Yes.

SIMON: Funny! I don't mind how much I get because I'm still your husband.

ANGELA: Simon, there's no time to waste. I've been trying to tell you something.

SIMON: Quite, but this is important. What have you done with the fifteen hundred?

ANGELA: It's lying untouched in my bank.

SIMON: Things are looking up.

ANGELA: No, Simon. I shall need all that and more to pay back the insurance company.

SIMON: For God's sake! You're not going sentimental over a lot of bloody underwriters?

ANGELA: Not in the least, but I'm not going to prison for fraud for you or anybody else.

SIMON: Don't be an idiot. Why the devil should they ever know that I am alive?

ANGELA: Because you made the fatal mistake of letting *us* know you are.

SIMON: Are you trying to be clever?

ANGELA: Oh, use your wits, Simon. This is the kind of mess you've got into because you've never looked ahead. You wouldn't have deserted if you'd stopped to think what it would mean.

SIMON: Ah, come out of the pulpit and back to facts. How the hell do you think you can pay back the insurance company without father and every newspaper in the country finding out why you were doing it.

ANGELA (*calmly*): I don't, Simon.

[*Simon starts and watches her with a touch of apprehension.*]

SIMON: What's that mean?

ANGELA: That sooner or later, Robert's bound to find out.

SIMON: From you?

ANGELA: No, from you. You'd never be satisfied. You never are. You'd always be asking for more—and more. When one source of supply gave out you'd tap another until finally you reached him.

SIMON: You're wrong and I'll tell you why. Joan has threatened to give me away if he discovers the truth. She thinks, on top of all this (*gesturing to the model*), that it 'ud break his heart. So you see, I've

got to keep quiet. With all her faults, she's a girl of her word.

ANGELA: If she thought about it she'd realise the impossibility of keeping the truth from him.

SIMON: So what?

ANGELA: There's only one thing for you to do. You must give yourself up.

[*He looks at her incredulously.*]

SIMON: Are you trying to be funny?

ANGELA: Oh, Simon, you can't spend the rest of your life running away. I was desperately unhappy as your wife, but I've enough pity left to wish you were dead rather than facing the sort of future that's before you.

SIMON (*emotionally*): I know what my future is without you telling me. If this government had a spark of human pity they'd have declared an amnesty for deserters months ago. It's their fault we have to live this way. There are thousands of poor devils like me without a penny to their names who have to cheat and thieve and kill to keep themselves alive. (*He recovers some of his self-control*) But I'm luckier than most. I have got a chance to cash in and pull out—and, by God, I'm going to take it.

ANGELA: And if they catch you to-morrow, or next week, or next year, your hold on us will be gone and you'll never get another penny.

SIMON: I'll risk that. I've fooled 'em for two years.

ANGELA: It won't last, Simon. You've only one chance—to give yourself up now.

SIMON: And while I sew mail bags you and the boy friend romp discreetly in Harley Street, I suppose?

ANGELA: No, Simon. I want a divorce. If you let me have one and give yourself up, I promise to make over the whole of my income to you from the day you come out of prison.

SIMON: I see. (*He gives a little laugh*) And where's

Berlin and tell him why he must forget about it. Joan's too fond of Robert to talk so . . . (*She looks at Simon with bitterness and hatred in her eyes*) . . . you'll have to look round for someone else to keep you.

MAX: You're wrong, my darling.

[*Simon looks up, interested. Max continues slowly and deliberately.*]

Before you rang me up to-night I told Aunt Katherine about us in confidence.

[*A look of consternation comes over Angela's face. Simon cheers up enormously.*]

She promised not to tell anybody, but she knows and nothing can alter that.

ANGELA: Oh, Max, why?

MAX: You're why.

[*There is such a wealth of devotion in the way he says this that she can find no reproach for him. Simon heaves a sigh of relief.*]

SIMON: I must say that puts a much more cheerful complexion on things—though it was hardly fair keeping it up your sleeve like that.

[*He produces an apple from the bag and takes an appreciative bite. Joan enters and closes the door behind her.*]

JOAN: He's coming up the drive.

ANGELA: You'd better clear out.

[*Simon's satisfaction gives way to funk. He drops the apple into the bag and gets up.*]

SIMON: I'll finish my picnic upstairs. (*He moves towards the smaller door*) When the coast's clear for a further conference give me a whistle—like this! (*He whistles a little cadenza*) Or I might come

scutting down every time someone whistled a dog.

MAX: I don't see why you wouldn't.

SIMON: Watch that sense of humour of yours, old chap, or it may land you in trouble.

[He looks across at Angela, who looks utterly defeated.]

Hard luck, Angela, it was a good effort.

[He goes out.]

JOAN: Try to seem as normal as possible. He has an uncanny sense of atmosphere.

[She goes over and switches on the radio to a negro swing number.]

Have you decided anything?

ANGELA *(with sudden emotion)*: Joan, Robert must be told.

JOAN *(her eyes blazing)*: He shan't be told.

ANGELA: Why must we be the ones to suffer? Has he any more right to be happy than we have?

JOAN: Yes—he's blind.

[Angela's spark of resentment dies out and she gives a hopeless shrug.]

ANGELA: Very well. I shall go back to Berlin tomorrow.

MAX *(hotly)*: For God's sake, face facts, Angela. What am I to tell my family?

ANGELA: That's up to you. My mind's made up.

MAX *(with grim determination)*: So's mine. If you leave me, Angela, I'll kill him.

JOAN *(warningly)*: Look out!

[The others turn towards the door as Robert enters and stands frowning towards the wireless set.]

ROBERT: Do we have to fill the house with negro music?

JOAN: I'll turn it off.

ROBERT: Don't trouble, I will.

[*He goes to the radio and turns it off, then looks round.*]

Who else is here?

ANGELA: Oh, you haven't met Major Oliver, have you, Robert?

MAX: How do you do, sir?

ROBERT: You're the doctor, aren't you?

[*He holds out a hand to Max who takes it.*]

MAX: Yes. How are you, sir?

ROBERT (*still holding his hand*): Are you cold?

MAX: No.

ROBERT: What's your age? (*He releases Max's hand.*)

MAX (*surprised*): Thirty-two.

ROBERT: What's a man of your age and grip trembling for?

MAX: Was I?

ROBERT: You were.

MAX (*with a forced laugh*): My uncle told me you were a very frightening person.

ROBERT (*chuckling*): Clandon has no use for me, but I like him. I like any man who goes down with his flag flying. (*He moves to the drinks table*) Who whistled when I was coming up the drive?

[*There is no reply, but everyone is tense.*]

Well?

ANGELA: It must have been the wireless.

ROBERT: It wasn't on.

JOAN: As we turned it on, perhaps.

ROBERT: Perhaps.

[*He whistles the same little cadenza whistled by Simon a moment before. Angela draws in a quick breath. Joan, in terror, darts to smaller door and puts her back against it in case Simon should come down.*]

What are you running about for?

JOAN: I dropped my compact. It rolled across the room.

ROBERT: I didn't hear it.

[He puts out his hand for the decanter, but misses it and wets his fingers in a jug of water.]

(*Angrily*) Hell! How many times have I asked people to put things back where they find them? Someone's been mucking about with the decanter.

JOAN: I'll get it for you.

ROBERT: It's all right—I will. (*He wipes his hand on a handkerchief*) Forgive me, Oliver. Blind men have their whims—tidiness and order are mine. (*He puts the handkerchief away*) Funny about that whistle. As a young man I used to whistle that way to let my wife know I was back from my works, but later in life she made me drop the habit—said it was vulgar. I suppose it's natural for a wife to think what her husband does is vulgar. (*He turns towards the drinks tray and once again gives the whistle.*)

JOAN: Don't whistle like that, Robert. It gets on my nerves.

[He cocks his head, puzzled.]

ROBERT: Jumpy, aren't you?

JOAN: No, I just don't like whistling.

ROBERT: You've never said so before.

JOAN: You've never done it before.

ROBERT (*good humouredly*): Another one who thinks it vulgar, I suppose. Did they give you a drink, Major Oliver?

MAX: I haven't wanted one, thanks.

ANGELA: Sorry, Max. I forgot.

ROBERT (*picking up the decanter*): Well, have one now? Whisky?

MAX: Gin, please. I don't drink whisky.

ROBERT: Help yourself.

[Max comes forward to do so. Robert tilts the whisky

decanter over his glass, but there is only a little left and nothing flows out. He tips it at an acute angle.]

You don't drink whisky, but somebody's punished the decanter since I had it last.

[Again there is a horrified exchange of glances.]

Have you taken to the bottle, Joan?

JOAN: No . . . No . . .

ROBERT: And one's enough to put Angela under the table, if I remember. Who's been at it?

JOAN: Does it matter, Robert?

ROBERT: Not much. Maybe that chap the police are looking for slipped in and helped himself while we were at dinner. *(He chuckles drily.)* He'll need a good head or he won't get far.

MAX: What chap's that, sir?

ROBERT: Man from a stolen car that was found deserted near Bergen copse.

MAX *(trying to be offhand)*: Oh? First I've heard of it.

ROBERT: Talking of cars, I hear you drove my daughter-in-law down from London.

MAX: Yes.

ROBERT: Then she must have told you what she's here for.

[Max hesitates. Angela speaks hurriedly.]

ANGELA: Yes, Max knows all about that.

ROBERT: So it's Max, is it?

ANGELA: That's his name.

ROBERT: Do you two know each other well?

ANGELA: Really, Robert, you're not going all Victorian on us? Anyway, we do.

JOAN: They met in Berlin.

ROBERT: Quite a coincidence.

MAX: Not so much as you'd think. When you divide it into zones, then take what's standing from what isn't, there isn't much left.

ROBERT: Germans get no sympathy from me.

[*Jessica, wearing a different loose cover, enters, shaking her head.*]

JESSICA: There are complex interruptive waves to-night. I've had nothing but a procession of disappointments. (*She sees Angela.*)

ANGELA: Hallo, Aunt Jessica.

JESSICA: Ah, Angela! At last! Why didn't you come to my room? (*She kisses her on the forehead.*)

ANGELA: As you weren't at dinner I thought perhaps you'd rather not be disturbed.

JESSICA: I'd received a call, that's all, but I should have been glad to see you. (*She looks at Max enquiringly*) Good evening, I don't think—

ANGELA: This is Major Oliver—Miss Streatford.

JESSICA: Lord Clandon's nephew?

MAX (*shaking hands*): Yes. How are you?

JESSICA (*taking this literally*): I'm having a lot of trouble with my sacro-iliac.

MAX: Oh, really?

JESSICA: Didn't your uncle tell you that you had an appointment to look at my pelvis?

MAX: No—he must have forgotten.

JESSICA: How extraordinary! It's quite a coincidence meeting you, Major Oliver. Tell me . . . (*She draws nearer and speaks in a conspiratorial tone*) . . . do you believe in people returning from the dead?

[*Angela sucks in her breath with a gasp. Joan looks horrified. Max controls himself with an effort and answers loudly.*]

MAX: No, I don't.

[*Robert looks increasingly perplexed.*]

JESSICA: Oh, what a pity! I thought, being a relative, you might be sympathetic.

MAX: Relative? I don't understand.

JOAN: It's all right. I can explain. It's—

JESSICA: Thank you, Joan, I prefer to give my own explanations. (*To Max*) Lady Rawley looks upon my psychic powers as a joke.

ROBERT: And not a very good one.

MAX (*relieved*): Ah! Spiritualism!

JESSICA: I cannot imagine why, but some curious and rather alarming things have occurred to me to-night.

[*Apprehension again appears on the faces of her listeners.*]

JOAN: Oh, Jessica, must we?

JESSICA: There's no need for you to listen if you'd rather not.

[*She turns confidentially to Max, as to an assured ally in these matters.*]

Lady Rawley is a sceptic, to say the least. When I told her, a few days ago, I had seen poor dear Simon materialise she made a most flippant suggestion. To-night I was trying to make contact with a cousin of yours, Lady Emily Rendel.

MAX: Oh, why?

JESSICA: Your uncle particularly asked me to do so. It seems, before joining the Great Majority, she failed to return a book they lent her.

MAX: That's what the great majority usually do, isn't it?

[*Robert emits a sudden staccato laugh.*]

ROBERT: Ha! I'm beginning to like you, Oliver. Have another drink?

MAX: Mine's still going, thanks.

JESSICA (*continuing bravely*): But just when I was feeling most hopeful my control failed me completely.

ROBERT: So will mine in a minute.

JESSICA: And the only visitant I conjured up was a swarthy figure in a blanket and a feather who gave the name of Big Sitting Buffalo.

ROBERT: Oh, God!

JESSICA: I might have been still with him if he hadn't made a very curious suggestion.

JOAN (*without humour*): Well, you can't expect much else from buffaloes, sitting or otherwise.

JESSICA (*tartly*): That kind of joke might amuse people in secretarial colleges, Joan, but nowhere else.

[*Angela appears to be labouring under the stress of some emotion. Her hands clench and unclench spasmodically. Jessica turns again to Max, who looks most unhappy.*]

As you're here, Major Oliver, why don't we see what we can do round a table?

MAX (*desperately*): Thanks very much, but I had dinner at home.

[*Suddenly Angela lets out a stifled laugh which goes into a fit of uncontrollable hysterics. Joan and Max run to her.*]

JOAN (*motioning Max away*): Angela, stop it! Stop at once, do you hear?

ANGELA (*gasping*): But it's so funny—so horribly funny—

JOAN (*taking her arm*): You'd better come outside for a minute.

MAX: Yes, yes. Take her into the garden. She'll be all right.

[*Joan nods desperately towards Robert who is standing looking towards them with a heavy, puzzled frown.*]

JOAN: Come on, Angela. We'll go into the garden.

[*She leads Angela out U.L. still sobbing and gasping. There is a short silence.*]

ROBERT: What's the matter with her?

JESSICA: I don't know what there was to giggle about. I didn't mean the dinner table—I meant turning if you can understand me.

ROBERT (*suddenly*): Jessica, I'd be obliged if you'd conduct your seances elsewhere.

JESSICA: Robert, I've half a mind—

ROBERT (*angrily*): I know that—

JESSICA: My dear Robert, Lord Clandon particularly asked me—

ROBERT: Well go where there aren't so many interruptive waves.

JESSICA: Very well. (*To Max*) If I fail in my attempt, doubtless you will explain to your uncle how little co-operation I get.

MAX: Er . . . thanks . . . that's very nice of you.

[*She goes out with dignity.*]

ROBERT (*sitting down again*): Sitting Buffalo! Lucky you didn't bring two of your associates to-night.

MAX: Oh, why?

ROBERT: Put that woman in front of three doctors and they'd certify her in a minute. (*He taps an adjacent chair*) Come and sit down.

[*Max seats himself, looking wary and ill at ease.*]

ROBERT: Now, Oliver, what's going on in this house?

MAX: I beg your pardon?

ROBERT: I said what's going on.

MAX: How should I know, sir. I'm a stranger in these parts.

ROBERT: If you don't know what goes on in people's minds you can't be much of a doctor.

MAX: I look after bodies—not minds. I'm not a psychiatrist.

ROBERT: You don't need a long word like that to know that something's up. How old did you say you were?

MAX: Thirty-two.

ROBERT: What did you do in the war?

MAX: I was with the Eighth Army—spent a few months in Italy, then came home and went to France with a battalion of the Coldstream.

ROBERT: Pretty energetic war.

MAX: Fairly.

ROBERT: Shake hands.

[He holds out his hand. Max takes it, frowning. Robert releases it.]

Steady as a rock. You've got your control back.

MAX: Now look, Sir Robert—

ROBERT: I can't look, Oliver, but I can feel and when you first gave me your hand it was shaking like the blade of a trembler coil.

MAX: I shouldn't wonder.

ROBERT: But you didn't tell me why.

MAX: All right, then. I was angry.

ROBERT: With me?

MAX: Of course not. Why should I be?

ROBERT: With whom then? It wouldn't be Angela—your friendship with her doesn't strike me as the quarrelling kind.

MAX: With no one in particular.

ROBERT: Just angry, eh?

MAX: That's it.

ROBERT: What about?

MAX: Something that concerns me.

ROBERT: Is that your way of telling me to mind my own business?

MAX: Yes, sir, it is.

ROBERT: That's frank at least. But the mystery remains unsolved. *(Pause)* When I was in the drive I distinctly heard a whistle coming from this room.

MAX: So you said.

ROBERT: My ears don't make many mistakes. Yet when I asked who whistled, nobody answered.

MAX: I thought somebody suggested the wireless!

ROBERT: In America they've a machine called a lie detector. I often wonder they don't employ blind men for the job.

MAX: Is that your way of calling me a liar, sir?

ROBERT: No, but if the cap fits you can wear it. Is there a square ashtray on that table?

MAX: Yes.

ROBERT: Pick it up and drop it.

[*Puzzled, Max picks up the ashtray from the table and lets it fall.*]

Did you hear that?

MAX: I saw it. (*He picks up the ashtray.*)

ROBERT: I asked if you heard it?

MAX: Naturally?

ROBERT: And so did I.

MAX: Well, what's it go to show?

ROBERT: I'm wondering why my wife said she dropped her powder box—it's gold and about the size of that ashtray—then apparently chased it half across the room to that door. (*He nods towards smaller door.*)

MAX: It must have rolled.

ROBERT: Square objects don't roll. I know she went to that door because I heard the click of the latch when she leant against it. But I didn't hear the powder box fall, because she didn't drop it. Any views about that?

MAX: None at all, sir.

ROBERT: You're not going to talk, are you?

MAX: I'm finding these questions rather embarrassing.

ROBERT (*grimly*): You don't have to tell me that.

MAX: And I don't suppose there's any need to tell

you, if your wife was hiding something, that the last thing I should do would be to talk about it.

ROBERT: That's fair enough. So number two mystery joins number one on the unsolved list. (*A pause*) Which of you opened that door, anyway?

MAX: It must have been left open.

ROBERT: Why? It's never used.

MAX: May I have another drink?

ROBERT: Go on—you probably need it.

MAX: Thanks. (*He meets trouble half-way*) And now I suppose we're back to the question: Who punished your whisky?

[*He helps himself. Robert gives a grim but appreciative smile.*]

ROBERT: You're not a psychiatrist, but you took the words out of my mouth that time. That's number three. They're adding up, aren't they?

MAX: It's easy enough to create mysteries if you want to.

ROBERT: Easy when you're blind, you mean?

MAX: I didn't, but now you mention it, I imagine it would be.

ROBERT: You miss a lot with your eyes, but pick up unexpected things with your other senses. For example, I'm surprised when someone jumps a mile because a daft woman asks stupid questions about people returning from the dead.

MAX: Well, it was a bit startling—out of the blue like that.

ROBERT: Granted, but the average person laughs at silly questions. They don't jump out of their skins.

MAX: I don't think I did.

ROBERT: I didn't say you did, Oliver; but Angela did. Why?

MAX (*desperately*): I don't know. You'd better ask her.

ROBERT: You may not have noticed, but at the moment she's having screaming hysterics—why?

MAX (*edgily*): Why ask me?

ROBERT (*stolidly*): Very well, doctor. There are numbers four and five. Am I beginning to impress you?

MAX: You're beginning to annoy me rather.

ROBERT: Good. Then we may get ~~some~~ewhere. I don't know how well you know Angela, but I've only known her behave like that once before. It was the night we had the news that my boy was dead.

MAX: Then there's probably some connection. This is her first visit here since and it's not unnatural—

ROBERT: I can't accept that. If her memories of Simon were so painful she wouldn't have turned up with you in tow.

MAX: Let's be accurate. It was I who gave her the lift.

ROBERT: That's a quibble.

MAX: And yours was a pretty broad generality. Besides your son's been dead a long time and, unless you believe in a state of perpetual mourning, I'm sure you can't have any objection to her making new friends.

ROBERT: What makes you so sure?

MAX: I believe you married less than two years after your wife died.

ROBERT: Who mentioned marriage?

MAX: Perhaps I went to an extreme.

ROBERT: You did and what I chose to do was my affair.

MAX: And what she chooses to do is hers—or isn't it?

ROBERT: Are you suggesting that Angela might want to marry you?

MAX: I was merely suggesting that you've no monopoly in doing as you please.

ROBERT: You are in love, aren't you?

MAX: I didn't say so.

ROBERT: I've nothing against you, Oliver. You're a

likely enough lad, but you know what's happening on Monday and if you read your papers to-morrow you may get a bit of a surprise. Well, I don't intend that the tribute I'm paying to my son should be spoiled by the spectacle of his widow making sheep's eyes at you or any other suitor.

MAX: I think we'd better stop this if you don't mind.

ROBERT: Why?

MAX: Because I'd rather not have a row on my first visit to your house.

ROBERT: I see, but there's only one thing that puzzles me about you.

MAX: What's that?

ROBERT: If you are in love with her, of which I'm certain, why not come into the open and say so?

[*Max gives a laugh.*]

MAX: Well, to tell you the truth, sir, your attitude doesn't exactly encourage confidence.

ROBERT: But you're not the type to be put off by that. There's the puzzle, Oliver. That makes number six.

[*There is a knock on the door.*]

Who is it?

KATE (*off-stage*): Me, Sir Robert—Kate.

ROBERT: Come in. What are you knocking for?

[*Kate enters.*]

KATE: Because last time I came up the door was locked and I thought it might be still.

ROBERT: Locked? It's never locked.

KATE: It was locked.

ROBERT: Who locked it?

KATE: Her Ladyship. She didn't wish to be disturbed.

ROBERT: Why?

KATE: I don't know and it wasn't my place to ask.

ROBERT: Was she alone?

KATE: I couldn't say. I was outside.

ROBERT: Well, what do you want?

KATE: Well, sir, it's most peculiar and for once it wasn't Miss Jessica because I asked, so, unless you popped into the pantry on your way out this evening, I can make neither head nor tail of it.

ROBERT: Why should I pop into the pantry? I never do.

KATE: Then what became of the two legs of that boiling fowl left over from dinner?

ROBERT: Have you gone daft?

KATE: I saw them under the fly wire as plain as plain not half an hour ago.

ROBERT: D'you mean they've gone?

KATE: Vanished. Cook had popped out for a breath of fresh air and I've just shown her the empty plate, with the marks on it clear as writing on a wall.

MAX: Perhaps she gave them to an admirer.

KATE (*coldly*): She would have said so if she had. Besides Cook's friend is Mr. Cheam the butcher so it would have been a case of taking coals to Newcastle as you might say.

ROBERT: Have you asked Lady Rawley?

KATE: No, Sir Robert, but I don't think it would have been her. She was in the kitchen chatting to me for quite a few minutes not long ago. (*To Max*) When you came down, sir, so if she had taken them she would have said.

ROBERT: Funny.

KATE: As I said to Cook: It's the first time I ever knew a pair of legs take wings.

ROBERT: Was the back door open?

KATE: Yes, Sir Robert. Cook locked it when she came home.

ROBERT: So this prowler fellow might have got in?

KATE: There! I'd forgotten all about him and

wouldn't mind betting that's the answer. I was away for about ten minutes, turning down my beds, and he could have nipped in then as easy as easy.

ROBERT: All right, Kate. You'd better see that the downstairs windows are fastened.

KATE: I certainly will, Sir Robert.

[*She goes out. Robert's forehead is seamed with lines of thought.*]

MAX: That obviously accounts for the whisky shortage, too.

ROBERT: Hm! (*He scratches his chin, then speaks almost to himself*) If someone *was* in this room after dinner, that would explain why she cried out, but—

MAX: Who, sir?

ROBERT: This was another mystery—before you arrived. But if he emptied the decanter he must have been a long time at it . . .

[*Joan enters.*]

JOAN: Angela's all right now.

ROBERT (*suddenly*): How's your ankle?

JOAN: Why? There's nothing wrong with it.

ROBERT: It caused you to cry out with pain when you came in after dinner.

JOAN: So it did—I'd forgotten.

[*Angela comes in.*]

ANGELA: I'm sorry I made such a fool of myself, Robert. I must be overtired. I think I'll go to bed.

ROBERT: I should.

[*The sound of the door knocker comes from downstairs.*]

JOAN: Who on earth is that?

ROBERT: Maybe it's the legs of the chicken come back from their walk.

Joan starts and looks at Max who puts a finger to his lips.]

JOAN: Chicken?

ROBERT: Someone went into the pantry and took two legs of chicken.

JOAN: Jessica, of course.

ROBERT: No, not Jessica.

ANGELA: Well, I'll be off now. Good-night, Robert. Good-night, Joan.

MAX: I'll say good-night, too.

ROBERT: Just one moment all of you! Joan!

JOAN: Yes, Robert?

ROBERT: Have any strangers been in this room to-night?

JOAN (*after a tiny pause*): No, Robert, no strangers.

ANGELA: Unless you count Max.

ROBERT: Not him.

JOAN: None, then.

[*Enter Kate.*]

KATE: Lord Clandon.

[*Enter Clandon.*]

CLANDON: Good evenin', Lady Rawley. A shockin' hour to call, Rawley, but the chief constable was at the house and gave me a lift to the end of the drive.

[He cocks a smiling eye at Max and darts Angela a friendly look, then directs himself again to Robert.]

So I thought I'd pop in, for when you think about it, this is no time for misunderstandings between your family and mine.

ROBERT (*puzzled*): That's nice of you. Get your uncle a drink, Oliver.

MAX: Yes—of course.

[He moves to the drinks table. Clandon looks appreciatively at Angela.]

CLANDON: So this is the young lady who—

JOAN (*hastily*): Of course, you haven't met Angela.

CLANDON (*gallantly*): What else am I here for?

[*At the drinks table, Max clinks a glass loudly in a vain effort to attract his uncle's attention.*]

CLANDON: Y'know, m'dear, one look at you is far more persuasive than an ocean of talk.

ROBERT (*increasingly puzzled*): Persuasive of what?

CLANDON: Well, my dear fellow, we—

MAX (*cutting in desperately*): Why didn't you use your own car, Uncle?

CLANDON: Petrol. The drop of extra we scrounged from the farm tractor was pinched by the fellows repairin' bomb damage to the church. (*He takes a glass from Max who is trying, without success to attract his attention*) A dirty trick in one sense—poetic justice in another. (*He raises his glass*) Well, with all the pleasure in the world, I give you—

MAX (*cutting in again*): Don't let's have any toasts, Uncle. They're out of date.

CLANDON: What's that matter?—So am I.

ROBERT: Yes, why not, Oliver? If your uncle wants to give us a toast, why shouldn't he?

MAX: Well, it's getting late and we've kept you up too long as it is.

CLANDON: Nonsense—this is an occasion!

MAX: You're generally in bed by this time, Uncle—

CLANDON: Not to-night, my boy!

MAX: What are you doing gallivanting about with the chief constable?

CLANDON: The whole of the county police are out to-night lookin' for some rascal believed to be at large in the neighbourhood. (*Puts glass on drinks table.*)

JOAN: He stole a car, didn't he?

CLANDON: Worse than that. He clouted a bobby at Wincanton who jumped on the running board and

tried to stop him, and the poor fellow died to-night.

[This news is received with different reactions from its hearers. It is now certain Simon is the wanted man.]

ROBERT: So now it's a murder charge, eh?

CLANDON: Yes.

ROBERT: Have they got a description of the man?

CLANDON: Yes. The policeman managed to speak before he died. The fellow's got a deep scar running down his right cheek.

[Angela sinks on armchair by window.]

MAX: I'll get you a drink, Angela. *(Half moves to her.)*

[Angela shakes her head.]

CLANDON: No, Max, wait a minute. Rawley, I had the impudence to bring along a magnum of champagne to celebrate the occasion. Max, pop down to the hall and fetch it.

MAX: Uncle, please!

CLANDON: Ah, stop being so bashful, Max. None of us were at the weddin' so I suggest that we drink to the bride and bridegroom now we have the chance.

MAX: Uncle!

ROBERT: Just a minute—I don't get this.

CLANDON: Surely you don't mean they haven't told you either?

ROBERT: Told me what?

CLANDON: Well, upon me soul, this is carryin' things too far. You're a couple of damned young fools. Rawley's as human as the rest of us.

ROBERT: When you've finished, I'd like to speak for myself, Clandon.

CLANDON: Passed to you, Rawley, and I hope you give them the wiggin' they deserve.

ROBERT: Angela, come here.

[*Angela rises and approaches.*]

ANGELA: Yes, Robert?

ROBERT (*quietly*): Why didn't you tell me you were married?

[*There is a long pause. Angela stands stiffly before him, staring ahead of her, then speaks in a strained, unnatural voice.*]

ANGELA: I'm not married, Robert.

[*Clandon starts and looks at her incredulously.*]

ROBERT: You heard what Clandon said.

ANGELA: Yes, but it isn't true.

CLANDON: What is this? (*To Max*) Say something, Max, instead of standin' there like a lunatic.

MAX: I've nothing to add.

CLANDON: You can't fob us off with a damn silly answer like that. Your aunt told me you'd been married by an army chaplain in Berlin six weeks ago.

ANGELA (*tonelessly*): She's mistaken. We're not married.

CLANDON (*losing his customary composure*): Are you suggestin' my wife made this up?

MAX: You heard what Angela said. Isn't that enough?

CLANDON: No, it isn't. If you didn't tell her, what possible reason could your aunt have for spinnin' a yarn like that?

[*Max doesn't reply. Clandon turns to Joan.*]

I'm sorry, Lady Rawley. I'm out of my depth.

ROBERT (*grimly*): Leave this to me. Angela, will you give me your solemn word of honour you did not marry Maxwell Oliver?

JOAN: Robert, she's said so, hasn't she?

ROBERT (*with a silencing gesture*): Before dinner to-night you said you'd some news. What was it?

ANGELA (*after a short pause for thought*): I—I managed to smuggle in a Leica camera for your birthday.

ROBERT: A Leica camera for a blind man! And that's about what the rest of your answers are worth.

[*With a half sob, Angela turns towards the door and exits. Max follows her out. There is a pause.*]

CLANDON: Either I'm off my chump or they are.

ROBERT: Someone is.

CLANDON: Let me assure you, Rawley, that I came here to-night sincerely and with the best intentions.

ROBERT: I know that, Clandon. I'm not a fool.

CLANDON: But I can't begin to understand it. My wife's not the woman to—

ROBERT: Let's face it, Clandon, the boy obviously told his Aunt he was married, but something's happened since to make him wish he hadn't spoken.

CLANDON: What could have happened?

ROBERT: That's what I'm going to find out.

CLANDON: Trouble is, if I know my wife, she'll have rung up the papers by now announcing the marriage. Never knew her yet keep a secret more than five minutes.

ROBERT (*with a cracked laugh*): That'll about finish it. A five hundred thousand pound memorial to Simon Rawley and the announcement that his widow has married again in the same paper.

JOAN: No, Robert.

ROBERT: What do you say?

JOAN: Do you mind leaving us alone for a few minutes?

[*Clandon nods wearily.*]

CLANDON: Yes, yes. I'll be gettin' home.

JOAN: No, please don't go. Do you mind waiting in the morning room? You know where it is. I—I think I'll want to see you again.

CLANDON: Anything you say, my dear.

[*He walks to the door and exits, shaking his head.*]

ROBERT (*wearily*): In other circumstances, I might have thought those three had got together on this wedding business to make a public fool of me.

JOAN: You know that isn't true.

ROBERT: Yes. Clandon is as shaken as I am, but whether they meant it or not, that's what it's come to, isn't it? You'd better ring *The Times* and tell them to hold back the announcement.

JOAN: I have, Robert.

ROBERT: You have? Why?

JOAN: Because—(*she checks herself*) I thought it was a mistake.

ROBERT: So you said—and told me to go ahead without you.

JOAN: Yes, but when I'd thought things over . . .

ROBERT: Heard about this marriage, you mean?

JOAN: No, I cancelled the announcement before I knew about that.

ROBERT: And you did that because you thought it would be a mistake? What did you think I would have to say?

JOAN: I . . . (*But she is out of her depth and cannot continue*) Robert, please don't try to catch me out.

ROBERT: Which means you're hiding something, doesn't it?

JOAN: It's just that I'm too tired to defend myself.

ROBERT: What's tired you?

JOAN: We had our first quarrel to-day. I know we haven't been very close to each other lately, but we'd never quarrelled before and—

ROBERT: Do you think I need reminding of that? Do you think it meant nothing to me?

JOAN: Then go slow, Robert. Try not to ask—even yourself—too many questions.

ROBERT: Why? Because the answers might be—unpleasant?

JOAN: Yes—no—

ROBERT: Then you are hiding something.

[*She doesn't answer, because she cannot.*]

I could list a dozen things that have happened since dinner this evening that not one of you wants to answer. (*He rises and moves about the room*) A lot of little things that don't seem to tie up and yet must relate to one another. A smell of human sweat in a room where no one has been for over an hour. A woman who cries out unexpectedly and twists an imaginary ankle. A decanter which empties itself; food which disappears; whistles; locked doors; unused doors which are open; an atmosphere which you could cut with a knife. Two people very much in love who deny their own words half an hour after they are uttered.

JOAN: Robert, Robert, please!

ROBERT (*pauses and turns to her*): What's happened? Why should an apparently honest young man turn suddenly into a liar? Who's been here and thrown everything into a lying confusion?

JOAN (*desperately*): Robert, will you stop? For your own sake—please . . .

[*Jessica enters.*]

JESSICA: A most extraordinary thing has happened.

ROBERT: Go away, Jessica!

JESSICA: I insist on being heard, if only to prove the folly and ignorance of refusing to believe.

JOAN: Jessica, can't it wait till later?

JESSICA: Not one moment can it wait. You know, Robert, that to-night I was carrying out an important research for Lord Clandon, but with so

many complex waves I decided to try and go higher. So I went to the upper floor.

[*Joan gasps. Robert turns to face C.*]

I was coming along the passage between the bath-room and the room where poor dear Simon's things are kept, when I saw a flickering light.

[*Robert crosses towards Jessica.*]

And who should be coming towards me, carrying a candle, but Simon himself.

ROBERT: Jessica, once and for all . . .

JESSICA: It's useless to shout at me, Robert. Simon was . . .

ROBERT: Either you get out of . . .

JESSICA: I insist on being heard! The Simon I saw to-night was a different being from the happy smiling wraith who has visited me in the past. He had a hungry, haunted air about him that filled my heart with pity. I spoke his name and, with a look of terror, his free hand came out and extinguished the candle. But—in the brief space of time he was visible I saw a terrible, jagged scar running down his right cheek.

ROBERT: What!

[*At the word "scar", the many confused clues in the mystery lock together into a single pattern in Robert's mind. For a second he rocks as though from a blow, then drops into his chair, clutching the arm rests and looking rigidly before him.*]

Simon!

[*Joan looks at him, checks what she is going to say, then moves quickly to Jessica.*]

JOAN (*kindly*): Thank you for telling us, Jessica, but please say nothing to anyone else.

JESSICA: Of course I won't. I know how painful this must be, but I'm sure that the poor boy does not approve the form his memorial has taken.

JOAN: I think you're right and Robert will do something about it.

JESSICA: I can only hope so. It's been a most upsetting evening and I think I shall go to bed.

JOAN: I should.

[*She gives Jessica a kiss to that lady's great surprise.*]

JESSICA: Thank you, Joan, that was nice of you. Good-night.

[*She goes out. Joan closes the door behind her and turns to look at Robert with despair in her eyes. He holds out a hand and she comes to him, takes it and kneels beside him.*]

JOAN: Oh, Robert, I'd have given the world to have kept this from you.

ROBERT (*barely audible*): You did your best and I'm grateful—to all of you.

[*Joan presses her cheek against his hand.*]

Joan, there's some mistake?

JOAN: No, Robert. He deserted.

ROBERT (*nodding*): Deserted—killed a man—sneaked into his home like a thief. You've talked to him?

JOAN: Yes.

ROBERT: Does he seem ashamed?

JOAN (*hesitates*): Well, you know Simon—

ROBERT: I don't. I thought I did. I'm wondering if the lad I believed he was ever existed. How did he get off the battlefield without—

JOAN: He left his identity papers on the body of a man who—couldn't be recognised.

ROBERT (*covering his face*): It makes me sick.

JOAN (*trying to find a loophole for pity*): It was dark,

Robert. He was alone and frightened. Perhaps if he had been with others—

ROBERT: A cheering crowd, you mean, to spur him on and shout "Bravo". Cowards' courage—I've no use for it. (*He passes a weary hand over his blind eyes*) His mother and I spoiled him—it's hard not to spoil an only boy. (*A pause*) He must have been here when I came up after dinner!

JOAN: Yes.

ROBERT: And he hadn't the guts to speak to me.

JOAN: He was startled—didn't know what to say.

ROBERT: But he spoke to you. Asked for money, I suppose?

JOAN: Yes.

ROBERT: As a beggar asks or with threats?

JOAN: Well, he . . .

ROBERT: Don't tell me—I know. So he's sunk as low as that. Did you promise to give him money?

JOAN: We would have given him some, of course. There wasn't any choice.

ROBERT: You could have told me.

JOAN: You know why I didn't.

ROBERT: Rather than hurt me you'd hang a murderer round your neck. And to think I came near losing you through him—(*He ends with a sort of sob.*)

JOAN: We didn't know then about the man he had killed. I doubt if he knows it himself.

ROBERT: Would it have made any difference if you had?

JOAN: His memory meant everything to you.

[*With deep emotion, he puts his arms round her.*]

ROBERT: This is a queer time to discover how lucky I am. (*He moves away, then turns to ask:*) Was Angela fond of him?

JOAN: No. I only learned to-night how unhappy he had made her.

ROBERT: And I thought she was lacking in loyalty! Oh, what it is to be blind! Would she have been happy with Oliver?

JOAN: I am sure she would.

ROBERT: So that's another thing he'd have smashed. He has a long account to settle—this son of mine.

JOAN (*desperately*): What are we going to do? What *can* we do?

[*Robert returns to his chair.*]

ROBERT: I'd like to be alone to decide.

JOAN: If there's any way I can help—

ROBERT: I've had ample proof of that, Jo. But now Simon's my problem and I must find the answer. Run along.

JOAN: Am I to tell Lord Clandon?

ROBERT: Not yet. Give me a little time. But ask him to make the speech on Monday and dedicate the club to all the lads who fell.

JOAN (*softly*): Very well.

ROBERT (*grimly*): And Jo, have that tablet smashed.

JOAN: Oh, Robert!

[*She puts her arms round him and hugs him to her.*]

We shall always have each other.

ROBERT: I'm grateful for these last few minutes we've spent together. They've taught me more about true values than I ever knew.

[*He draws her down and kisses her tenderly, then runs his fingertips caressingly over her face.*]

Funny knowing how beautiful you are without ever seeing you.

[*He kisses her again then gestures her towards the door. But as Joan moves away from him terror goes with her and at the door she turns in panic.*]

JOAN: Robert—Robert—you won't—

[He is silent and unable to put her fear into words, she goes out quickly and closes the door behind her. With the click of the latch, Robert's face hardens and there comes into it a look of desperate resolution. He takes Simon's photograph from the table and flings it towards the couch. Jerkily, he gets to his feet and makes his way through the parted curtains on to the balcony. Here he stands as a driver might stand before taking a leap. It seems certain he is about to throw himself over, but instead he turns, comes back into the room and stands thinking deeply. His course of action decided upon, he goes to the door U.L., locks it, puts the key in his pocket and extinguishes all the lights save a single standard lamp above the smaller door. This he opens and whistles the now familiar cadenza. He listens, but nothing happens. Again he whistles and this time hears Simon repeat the whistle from above. He then stands with his back to the wall immediately above door, which conceals him from Simon as he comes in and walks to the middle of the room.]

SIMON: Joan, did that old fool, Jessica, tell you she'd seen—Joanie!

[He is moving towards the light switches when Robert shuts the smaller door, locks it and pockets the key. Simon swings round, sees him and gasps.]

Father!

[Robert makes no immediate reply. He comes forward a few paces.]

ROBERT: You'd nothing to say to me an hour ago—but now I've things to say to you. Sit down. Take the chair next to mine.

[Simon hesitates whether to obey, but concludes that flight would be more prudent. He starts to tiptoe to the door.]

That door's locked, too.

[*Simon halts and turns.*]

SIMON (*in a cracked voice*): Why?

ROBERT: Ghosts are slippery customers. Take the chair next to mine.

[*Like a bird fascinated by a snake, Simon obeys.*]

That's better.

[*Robert moves into his own chair and sits.*]

SIMON: You must wonder why I didn't try to see you at once, but I thought it would be easier if Joan told you I was back. I knew it was bound to be a bit of a shock, but honestly, I can explain everything.

ROBERT: Well?

SIMON (*wetting his lips*): What have the others told you? Don't believe a word Joan says. She was always jealous of me. What *did* she tell you?

ROBERT: No more than I've found out for myself.

SIMON: Rheumatic fever was the trouble. A dicky heart from the word go. Maxwell Oliver was on to it in a second. When they detailed me for that recce. job I ought to have gone sick—

ROBERT: Why didn't you?

SIMON: You know how it is in that kind of show. If I'd dropped out at the last minute some other poor beggar would have been roped in.

ROBERT: So you waited to drop out until no one could see you?

SIMON: No, it wasn't like that—you must believe me. (*He searches his mind for a plausible excuse*) Here, feel this scar on my face.

ROBERT: I'll take your scar for granted.

SIMON: I still don't know what hit me, but the shock blew my wits to hell. From that moment until God knows when I lost all sense of who I was or where I was. I don't know to this day how I got

way or reached the place where I came to my senses weeks later.

ROBERT: And then it was too late to make a clean breast of things?

SIMON: It wouldn't have been if I hadn't lost my nerve. Not reporting back for duty was the greatest mistake I ever made.

ROBERT (*grimly*): You may have made a greater without knowing it. Well, now you're back, what are your plans?

SIMON: To get to South America.

ROBERT: Without a passport?

SIMON: There are plenty to be had—if you can pay for them.

ROBERT: If *I* can pay for them?

SIMON: You've always been so wonderfully generous—(*A pause*) Joan told me what you were doing about this memorial. Made me want to cry.

ROBERT: To think of all that money going into other people's pockets.

SIMON: That's not fair. I know I've hurt you and I hate myself for doing it, but I'm as much a war casualty as if I'd lost an arm or leg.

ROBERT: So you came home for sympathy?

SIMON: I was longing to see you all. (*His voice trembles childishly*) This life's hell. Day after day; month after month, living with a lot of swine—

ROBERT: You chose the life.

SIMON: I didn't know. How could I have known? And once I'd cut loose there was no other. I would have come back ages ago, but I was too ashamed. So I made up my mind to make good first. I tried desperately hard, but it can't be done—it can't. You're forced down and down. You wouldn't believe the depths you're driven to just to keep alive.

ROBERT: Wouldn't I?

SIMON: Stealing all the time—identity cards, ration

books, food, clothes, money. Swindling people; snatching women's handbags; even spying on lovers in woods—and always on the run. Sleeping in filthy doss houses which are raided every other night—and never knowing from one minute to the next whether you'll be dead, in gaol or running for your life. (*He pauses, breathless, impressed by his own appeal*) I tell you, I'm dead beat, father, that's why I came home—that's why you've got to help me.

ROBERT: Got to, did you say?

SIMON: I didn't mean it that way. I only want . . .

ROBERT: . . . to be saved from leading that sort of life any longer?

SIMON: Yes. Yes.

ROBERT (*his voice like a whip lash*): So now you've come home to cheat and blackmail your own folks.

SIMON: No, whoever says so is a liar.

ROBERT: You're a liar, Simon. No man could have been prouder of his son than I was of you. It's not until now I realise my mistake.

SIMON: If you thought it worth while to lay out a fortune on my memory, surely you won't . . .

ROBERT (*with a shadow of a smile*): Yes, it must be flattering to know I was spending half a million because you'd died. (*He pauses and his voice hardens*) It'll soften the shock to know that I wouldn't spend one farthing to keep you alive.

SIMON (*with a snarl*): Don't be too sure of that. You can't brush me off quite so easily. (*Then winning again*) I don't want to do more harm than I've done already, but if you refuse to see me through, you'd better look out.

ROBERT (*very slowly*): I shall see you through, Simon, never fear.

SIMON (*warily*): How?

ROBERT: I'd have told you at once, but I wanted to know the strength of your case first.

SIMON (*more hopeful*): Well, if I did open my mouth,

a lot of people would look rather comic—yourself included.

ROBERT: I'm thinking of them, Simon. I'm thinking of the people whose happiness it's in your hands to destroy. I've no fear of looking comic myself. I shall be dead.

SIMON (*startled*): What do you mean?

ROBERT: The last owner of this house fell from that balcony and broke his neck. When I've done what must be done, that's what'll happen to me.

SIMON: You can't fool me with a tale like that!

ROBERT: Have I ever made a promise I didn't keep?

SIMON: If you think you can do me down by committing suicide—

ROBERT: I don't. I wouldn't make a mistake like that. I am taking no chances, Simon. The other's aren't as well fitted to cope with you as I am.

[*Sensing a new danger, Simon falls back on his established policy of retreat. As quietly as possible, he starts easing his way towards the smaller door.*]

No, Simon. If you're thinking of giving me the slip, you should have stepped clear of that creaking board.

[*Simon seizes and rattles the handle of door L.*]

That door's locked. The keys are in my pocket and if you were thinking of the balcony, the police are all over the grounds.

SIMON: You can't scare me with the police.

ROBERT: A deserter?

SIMON: But I'm not. I died like a hero outside Caen—my father spending God knows what putting up memorials in my honour.

[*There is a short silence.*]

ROBERT: Did you come through Wincanton on your way here?

SIMON: I don't remember.

ROBERT: In a stolen car—and there was trouble with a policeman you pushed off the running-board.

SIMON: What's that to do with it?

ROBERT: He died in hospital to-night.

SIMON: Oh, God, no!

ROBERT: Yes, Simon. Half the police in the county are wanting to talk to you.

SIMON: What?

ROBERT: A thief, deserter, blackmailer, murderer. It doesn't leave much on which to plead for mercy. You'd have done better to face the Germans with those other lads. Then at least you did have a chance of coming through.

SIMON (*panic-stricken*): You wouldn't give me up? (*He starts to breathe spasmodically.*)

ROBERT: Alive I wouldn't. You'd talk too much. That's why, before I step off the balcony, you're going to die.

[*Simon gives a choking cry.*]

SIMON: Stop saying such things—do you hear? You wouldn't hurt me—it'd be murder.

ROBERT: No, justice, Simon, though I shan't be alive to argue the point.

[*In his terror, Simon is shaking from head to foot.*]

SIMON (*claws Robert*): Father—let me out—Let me out of here—I'll go away—you'll never see me again. Give me a chance to make a break for it—That's not much to ask.

[*Robert turns, puts hand on Simon's chest, and flings him across the room to the couch. Then he crosses hurriedly towards the standard lamp.*]

Let me out—that can't hurt you—you've got to let me out—Father—please—

[*Robert seizes flex of standard lamp and wrenches it from the wall-plug. The room is plunged in darkness save for the blue light that filters through the window.*]

ROBERT: Now we're on equal terms. (*To above wing chair.*)

SIMON (*at couch, produces a knife*): If you come near me, I'll kill you. Where are you? Don't come near me! I've a knife—I've a knife—

ROBERT: Use it, Simon, while you've still time.

SIMON: You can't kill your own son.

ROBERT: My son died in France.

SIMON: No—no—no . . .

[*Simon creeps to armchair by window, then slowly moves towards Robert, knife in hand.*]

ROBERT: You must breathe quieter than that to catch me unawares.

[*Simon stops, whimpering.*]

SIMON: Damn you—damn you—you can't do this—you can't—

ROBERT: God help me—I've got to—

[*With the last word, he steps from the darkness with outstretched hands, taking Simon unawares. Gripping his throat with one hand and Simon's right (knife) hand with his left, he struggles with him. Robert forces him to drop the knife, but Simon twists away under Robert's arms, overturns chair C. in Robert's path, and moves away. Robert stumbles and falls over chair, but rises and follows. Simon moves wing chair in his path, making him blunder into it, then runs quickly up to the door and, with no thought beyond escape from the room, hammers on the panel, crying hysterically.*]

SIMON: Help! Help—let me out—

[*Robert runs swiftly and unerringly to Simon and drags him from the door. They struggle on the floor,*

trying to get at the other's throat. Robert slips and falls. Simon totters to his feet, and moving C., overturns the small table, then staggers up towards window. There is the sound of breaking glass as he puts his arm through window. Robert, lost to all direction, blunders into overturned table like a drunken man, trying to find the balcony. Running feet are heard off stage.]

ROBERT: Where are you?

JOAN (*off*): Robert! Open the door! Let us in!

[*Hammering on door.*]

ROBERT: Keep out of here! (*Reaching balcony.*)

MAX (*off*): Here, out of the way, let me!

[*The door is burst open, Max and Joan, followed by Angela and Clandon, plunge in. Joan sees Robert's danger and cries:*]

JOAN: Robert! No, no!

[*She and Max rush to his aid, Joan leading him back to his misplaced chair. Angela has switched on the chandelier light and Clandon, shaking his head at the confusion, has moved up to the window.*]

CLANDON: What happened, Rawley?

ROBERT (*breathlessly*): He must have jumped into the courtyard.

MAX: No, he's here—on the balcony.

[*Simon's body was hidden between the two windows. Max pulls it into view.*]

He's dead.

ROBERT: Dead.

MAX (*picking up knife*): He had a knife.

ROBERT: Has he stabbed himself?

MAX: There's not a mark on the blade. He died of fright by the look of him.

ROBERT (*bitterly*): I shouldn't wonder.

[*Angela and Max look at each other. They are out of the wood.*]

CLANDON (*pointing*): Here, do you see that scar?

[*He comes down, picking up the fallen chair.*]

This must be the fellow they were looking for.

ROBERT (*rising*): Take me to him.

JOAN: No, Robert.

ROBERT: Do as I say.

[*As Joan leads him to the balcony, Clandon picks up the photograph. He recognises its likeness to the corpse.*]

CLANDON: Good God!

ROBERT (*kneeling by Simon*): Poor lad! He did have a scar. (*Rises and moves D.S.*) Draw the curtains! Ring up the police, someone.

[*Max draws the curtains as Robert drops into his chair.*]

CLANDON: Before we do **that**, Rawley, I wonder if I might make a suggestion. When my son was killed I put away every picture and photograph of him in the house and I believe if you did the same you would save yourself a lot of—unhappiness.

[*Realising that Clandon knows the truth and wants to befriend them—*]

ROBERT: Thanks, Clandon.

CLANDON: What do you want me to tell the police?

ROBERT: Tell them to collect the body of an unknown man.

[*Clandon nods and picks up telephone receiver.*]

The Curtain Falls.

DON'T LISTEN,
LADIES !

*A comedy in three acts
from the French of
SACHA GUITRY*

*by
STEPHEN POWYS
and GUY BOLTON*

The cast at the first London performance at the St. James's Theatre on September 2, 1948, was as follows:

DANIEL BACHELET	—	—	<i>Francis Lister</i>
HENRIETTE	—	—	<i>Pamela Bevan</i>
MADELEINE	—	—	<i>Constance Cummings</i>
BARON DE CHARANCAY	—	—	<i>D. A. Mehan</i>
BLANDINET	—	—	<i>Denholm Elliott</i>
JULIE BILLE-EN-BOIS	—	—	<i>Ada Reeve</i>
VALENTINE	—	—	<i>Betty Marsden</i>
A PORTER	—	—	<i>Peter Franklin</i>
MICHEL AUBRION	—	—	<i>Ferdy Mayne</i>

Directed by William Armstrong.
Setting designed by Leon Davey.

The play ran for 219 performances.

All enquiries about the performance of this play must be made to Reandco Ltd., 29 Manfield House, 376 Strand, London, W.C.2.

Characters

In order of their appearance:

DANIEL BACHELET

HENRIETTE

MADELEINE

BARON DE CHARANCAY

BLANDINET

JULIE BILLE-EN-BOIS

VALENTINE

A PORTER

MICHEL AUBRION

SCENES

*The whole action of the play takes place in the room
behind Daniel Bachelet's antique shop in Paris.*

There is no interval between Acts II and III

ACT ONE

The luxuriously appointed room at the rear of Daniel Bachelet's antique shop in the vicinity of the Place Vendôme. It is full of beautiful bits of antique furniture.

Entrance to shop is through an archway to right. There is an archway opposite which shows a hall in which there is a private street entrance and that reveals the foot of the staircase that leads to Daniel's living quarters above.

The room is in part panelled with French period panelling. A large window across the back has a curtain hanging on its lower part which screens the view. Outside might be seen a chestnut tree—something to give the feeling of Paris. It is ten o'clock on Monday morning in the late Spring.

*There are two desks, one of which is referred to as an *escritoire*. The other is the one which Daniel uses, and this has letters and papers on it. This stands in the middle of the room with a banqueting or long stool, on right side of it and Daniel's chair on left. Further to right there is a *chaise-longue*. There are other chairs down stage on extreme left and right. The *escritoire* is down stage left. There is a telephone up stage end (French type telephone).*

At rise, Daniel, a handsome man of fifty, is seated at his desk polishing the cover of an antique book. Plainly he is upset, and in something of a "state". He puts the book down with a gesture of impatience, looks at his wrist watch and then, jumping to his feet, starts to pace about the room. He drops down to banquette that faces desk and sits with back to audience. Then turning his head so that he is almost speaking over shoulder he addresses audience.

DANIEL: Never marry! (*Turning round to face audience*) Don't listen to this, ladies—I am talking to the men—Disraeli, a very wise old boy, gave them the same advice. He said no man should marry, but that every woman should. That, of course, presents a problem. Someone has to give way. And you know who it is—not the women. It never is.

I am taking advantage of the fact that I am alone just now to tell you a thing or two about women—a confidential thing or two as from actor to audience—that's all. The moment anybody enters I shall abruptly cease to address you. No offence, I hope. It's just that if I went on talking to you, *they* would start talking to you as well—which would never do.

Where was I? Ah, yes. I was addressing a few remarks to the men who worship women—to the men who marry them—quite persistently some of us—changing wives from time to time, on the lending library principle; and, of course, always for a newer and smarter edition.

[*He rises and taking step to left he half leans against, half sits, on desk.*]

Gentlemen, let's face the facts. Let's recognise how fragile were the motives that induced us to choose this one rather than that one. Wait! I must take that back. Cut that word "choose". *We* don't choose them. *They* choose *us*!

It started right from the beginning. Think back to that first meeting with . . . if I may coin a phrase—the adored object. She came in, and you noticed that she was dark or fair, and then you forgot her. But she didn't forget *you*. The elephant never forgets.

You scarcely noticed her, but she noticed *you* all right. She knew at a single glance that you were

tall or short, stout or thin, robust or delicate. She knew that you were well-manicured—or bit your nails. She knew your exact age and all about you while you were beginning to think that her mouth was rather attractive.

Yes, she had made a complete inventory of you! Your tie, your suit, your wrist-watch, the new soles on your shoes, the tiny scar on your right cheek—and she had informed herself that you were a bachelor and reasonably rich while you were still wondering if her eyes were blue-grey or blue-green.

And it was then that the dirty work began. Yes, *dirty work*. Don't listen, ladies, I beg you!

Do I seem somewhat bitter, gentlemen? I am sorry. Normally, I am a kind and genial man—but when your wife spends the night away from home, as mine has just done, the little devil! (*He turns to chaise longue and picks up a small shoulder wrap that belongs to his wife. He strokes it, facing shop doorway. Then turns back*) and it isn't *only* last night—I've had my suspicions for some time . . . women—the pretty ones—they're like photographs. There's always some poor fool who treasures the negative while the clever boys are sharing the prints between them—Oh, woman, woman!

[*Enter Henriette, in archway L.*]

HENRIETTE: Sir?

DANIEL: What do you want?

HENRIETTE: I thought you called me, sir.

DANIEL: I didn't. I was talking to myself. Leave me with myself. We wish to be alone.

[*Henriette stares at him and goes out.*]

[*He cranes his neck, looking after her, making sure that she is out of earshot before resuming.*]

I don't mind telling you that a few days ago . . . I

should not have been talking like this. I should have been praising woman—her charm, her grace, her intelligence, her delicacy and her courage—you may listen to this bit, ladies—and should have bowed to her sometimes sublime devotion. (*He sits on the chaise-longue*) I should even have spoken quite nicely of woman's defects, for to love her defects is to undertake their defence. But not this morning.

No, not this morning.

I am through with women. In speaking of that sex, one word springs to the lips—Please stop listening ladies. (*He whispers*) the word "Bitches". And when I use the term, I realise that I am being slightly unfair to the four-legged creature whom it rightfully designates. A female dog is an honest, faithful creature. It does not tell lies. At least I don't think so. You must ask a male dog about that. Anyhow, my wife tells lies, and she doesn't even trouble to make her fantasies plausible. She continually insults my intelligence and what is still worse—but no, I had determined not to make this a *personal* complaint. I am not talking to a bar-tender. I have not yet reached the stage of crying into my beer.

So to revert to generalities: when you love a woman—(*Breaks off and seems to address a lady in the audience*) I'm sorry, dear lady, that you came here to-night. I find it embarrassing to say these things to your face—and such an attractive face, if I may be permitted (*Speaking to whole audience*) There should be a sign outside this theatre: "For Men Only"—except then, of course, the ladies would come in droves—

Now where was I? Oh yes, love—we'd got round to love. Unfortunately when there are women about, one always *does*. I do, especially. Well, gentlemen, I am convinced that in a great many cases they don't love *us*, they don't love us at all. But they go right on *pretending* they do. That's

their horrible advantage. *They* can make believe, *we can't*. There are biological reasons. And to show you how unfair it all is, I'll cite just one instance: *They* can give us children who aren't our own, but can we do that to *them*? (*Moves L. near desk*) No!

Loaded dice, gentlemen! The game's crooked.

A last word. If this little talk serves to deter *one* man among you from taking the fatal step that I have taken—not once, but twice—then I shall be well repaid. (*Sits at desk, then rises and sits again*) I thank you.

[*After he is seated, we hear a rat-tat on the door knocker up L. off stage.*]

Ah, someone approaches. The play is about to begin. And not before I was ready for it, either. This soliloquising is weary work. You ask Hamlet. MADELEINE (*off L. at street door*): It's all right, Henriette, I've found my key.

HENRIETTE (*coming into view from kitchen*): Very good, madame.

[*As she speaks Madeleine advances to centre of archway L. so that she is plainly in view. When Daniel hears Madeleine's voice he rises quickly and moves below desk to R. of C. facing archway L. Madeleine is a very beautiful, perfectly dressed woman in her early twenties.*]

MADELEINE (*on step*): Well, go on. Say it.

DANIEL: I beg your pardon?

MADELEINE: "Where have you been all night"?

DANIEL (*with irony*): Thank you. I might not have thought of asking that. Where *have* you been all night?

MADELEINE: You're going to be astonished when you hear this. It's really something quite extraordinary. (*Moving to up stage end of desk she puts her coat on armchair up L.*)

DANIEL: You had an attack of aphasia perhaps? You remembered your husband's name but couldn't think of his address.

MADELEINE: I have a feeling you are not going to believe this—

DANIEL: Oh? That is unusual, so I conclude the story must be even *more* so.

MADELEINE: We had an argument last night.

DANIEL: *That* I remember.

MADELEINE: You had made some disagreeable remarks about marriage.

DANIEL: Why is it that you women talk as if marriage were something in which you hold proprietary rights? The institution contains as many *males* as females. And I am an old member; you are quite a new one—I left the club and rejoined—

MADELEINE: Why don't you say "worse luck"? I can hear it in your voice.

DANIEL (*bursting out*): All right, "worse luck", then! It is true there is not much luck about having a wife who deceives you.

MADELEINE: Aren't you rather jumping to conclusions?

DANIEL: Look, I am trying to be patient—

MADELEINE: Then you might at least listen to what I have to say—

DANIEL: I *am* listening. In fact, I am begging you to tell me. (*Looking at his watch*) It is ten o'clock in the morning: you left the house at ten o'clock last night. Where have you spent those twelve hours?

MADELEINE (*moving to R. near chaise longue*): You left the house first.

DANIEL: Merely to post a letter.

MADELEINE: Who the letter was *to* you didn't choose to tell me.

DANIEL: You didn't ask me.

MADELEINE: Of course, I've a pretty good idea who

it was you were writing to in that feverish, passionate style.

DANIEL: Listen, I'm an old hand at this game, and am well aware that the phrase: "the best defence is attack" was *not* coined by Napoleon—They tell you that in the schools, but *I* know better! It was invented by a woman—Eve, most probably.

MADELEINE: You shouldn't get so steamed up. The veins on your temples swell, and that is dangerous in a man of fifty—pardon, fifty-one. (*She sits on chaise longue*).

DANIEL: Enough! I demand a straight answer to a straight question: Where did you spend the night.

MADELEINE: In the Big Wheel.

DANIEL (*giving his head a shake, as one might after a swim*): Would you mind repeating that?

MADELEINE: I spent the night in the Big Wheel at Luna Park.

DANIEL: In the Big Wheel. Really? Swinging gaily round and round like a squirrel in a cage, laughing to yourself at the thought of the poor sap who was pacing the floor, telephoning, questioning people in the street . . .

MADELEINE: I was not swinging round and round. I was stationary—stuck. Right up at the top, too—a break-down. They couldn't find the man to repair it until this morning.

DANIEL: Stuck in the Big Wheel! That surpasses anything that I had expected. (*Moving to C. below desk*).

MADELEINE: You might ask how did I happen to *be* in the Big Wheel?

DANIEL (*turns*): I might, indeed—but I won't.

MADELEINE: I was very upset after our quarrel. I wanted to *think*.

DANIEL: And what better place to think than the Big Wheel? (*Moves to chair L. of desk*).

MADELEINE: I walked and walked without noticing

where my feet were taking me . . . Faces were just a blur. I was thinking of you and me—our marriage . . . I crossed a bridge, I remember there was moonlight on the water. It reminded me of the balcony of our honeymoon suite at Deauville . . .

DANIEL: *Please*—spare me the nostalgia.

MADELEINE: Am I wasting my breath?

DANIEL: Completely. (*He sits at desk.*)

MADELEINE: Very well, then. (*She shrugs and turns away.*)

DANIEL: You will admit that you have told me some lies in your time?

MADELEINE (*turning back*): White lies.

DANIEL: When it comes to lies, I do not draw the colour line.

MADELEINE: I knew you wouldn't believe me! I made a bet with myself that you wouldn't. (*As she speaks, she takes book from her handbag. Rises and crosses to R. of desk*) Look, I wrote it down last night when I realised that the wheel was stuck: "I bet he won't believe me"—see? (*Leaning over desk showing him note book.*)

DANIEL: You win. I congratulate you. What odds did you give yourself? You must have realised that the price would be very short.

MADELEINE: All right—if you're going to be *nasty* about it—(*She moves up R. and over to Arch L. Her back to Daniel.*)

DANIEL (*rising and following her to L.*): I am not going to be *nasty*; I am going to be very nice. I am going to give you a chance to *change* your story to one that I can at least reject with some degree of self-respect—

[*Madeleine has turned away. He follows her.*]

I suggest that you were at your dear friend Madame Belin's. She will, of course, back you up. Now I come to think of it, you once spent the night at

Madame Belin's and she *did* back you up. You had a pain, such a bad pain you couldn't even telephone. Madame Belin couldn't even telephone.

MADELEINE (*turns, doggedly*): Don't believe it if you don't want to—I spent the night in the Big Wheel.

[*He stares at her for a moment, then going swiftly to his desk, picks up the telephone.*]

MADELEINE: What are you going to do?

DANIEL: I am paying you the compliment of telephoning to Luna Park.

MADELEINE: They will deny it, of course.

DANIEL: Ah!

MADELEINE: They will never admit that their wretched Wheel *can* get stuck.

DANIEL: Ah!

MADELEINE: It would ruin their business.

[*Daniel punctuates each sentence of her speech with a series of "Ah's".*]

DANIEL: You don't think if I told them that they are saving the honour of a lady—averting serious trouble—preserving a home?

[*As she does not answer.*]

No; I see—you have no great faith in the gallantry of Big Wheel operators.

MADELEINE (*moving a pace down L. as he replaces receiver*): What do you mean—"serious trouble"—"preserving a home"?

DANIEL: I may strike you as hopelessly old-fashioned, but I object to my wife having a lover. (*He moves up C.*)

MADELEINE: Oh! So *that* is your conclusion—I have a lover?

DANIEL: I am reasonably certain of it. (*Moving R. of C.*)

MADELEINE: Not very much to go on, have you?

DANIEL (*turns*): I have had other indications. This is merely the final turn of the screw—or, *should* I say, the Big Wheel?

MADELEINE: Very well then, I have a lover. I spent last night in his arms. (*Moving to chaise longue below desk. Then up R. near Daniel.*)

DANIEL (*with controlled anger*): So! You admit it!

MADELEINE: What else is there to do? You've already made up your mind.

[*They are both up R., facing each other.*]

DANIEL: You're very airy about it—Do you realise that women have been killed for this—if the man loved them enough?

MADELEINE: Let us hope your love is not at the pitch of Othello's—or Henry the Eighth's. (*She comes down R. near chair which is in R. corner.*)

DANIEL: No—there was a time last night when I might have gone to extremes—but now—looking at you here in the daylight.

MADELEINE: What do you mean? I look very well in the daylight. I admit I had a tiring night . . .

DANIEL (*bitterly*): I have no doubt. (*Moving to L. of desk.*)

MADELEINE (*sitting in armchair down R.*): So now, having no doubt, what are you going to do about it?

DANIEL: This house is not only my home, but my place of business. I can't very well walk out of it. So, it is rather a question of what *you* are going to do about it.

MADELEINE: You want me to leave you?

DANIEL: Well, put it this way—next time you have occasion to go out, don't come back. (*Moving to desk chair.*)

MADELEINE: You are very angry, aren't you?

DANIEL: Last night, I passed through various stages: very angry, very hurt, very unhappy . . . Now I am merely very tired. (*Sits at desk.*)

MADELEINE: I quite expected you to be violent.

DANIEL: I am sorry to disappoint you . . . I couldn't even work myself up to the pitch of *bitting* you. Please forgive me.

MADELEINE: Do you want a divorce?

DANIEL: I do.

MADELEINE: You've been divorced before.

DANIEL: Yes.

MADELEINE: Rather an expensive pastime, isn't it? That is, if you are obliged to go on contributing to your ex-wife's support—as you have with Valentine.

DANIEL: It is too late to worry about that.

MADELEINE: Or possibly too *soon*. It's after you have married your third wife that *that* shoe will pinch—that *pair* of shoes.

DANIEL: I have no intention of marrying again.

MADELEINE: You had no intention of marrying again when you met *me*.

DANIEL: True. Who knows? I may be incurable.

MADELEINE (*eyeing him closely*): I fancied you might have someone in mind.

DANIEL: No.

MADELEINE: I don't find your "no" very convincing. It has a hollow sound.

DANIEL: I don't know what you're getting at.

MADELEINE (*rising*): I'm getting at your reason for this mad rush to be rid of me. (*She sits on chaise longue.*)

DANIEL: "Mad rush?"

MADELEINE: Yes, like your mad rush to post that letter last night—

DANIEL: That letter was to my agent in New York.

MADELEINE: And your agent in New York writes you passionate love-letters in return—like the one I found in your desk.

DANIEL: Love-letter? And in my desk?

MADELEINE: Does it occur to you that until quite recently we were a blissfully happy couple? I used

to go about the place singing—Perhaps you haven't noticed that lately your song-bird has lost her voice?

DANIEL: You're making all this up.

MADELEINE: I have the letter, and would gladly show it to you—however, I expect that is hardly necessary. From its condition it is clear that it has been read and re-read. You probably have the contents by heart.

DANIEL: You say that you found this letter in this desk? (*He makes a gesture towards desk.*)

MADELEINE: Not that one—*that* one. (*She points to escritoire.*)

DANIEL: That is a very old desk. (*He turns and looks at escritoire.*)

MADELEINE: What has antiquity got to do with it? The letter is not from Du Barry or Pompadour. It is strictly modern—the phraseology, that is, not the ideas.

DANIEL: What I mean is, I haven't used that desk in ages.

MADELEINE: Except as a private salt-mine in which to conceal your treasures.

DANIEL: When did you find this letter?

MADELEINE: About three weeks ago.

DANIEL: And you said nothing about it?

MADELEINE: I felt a certain delicacy.

DANIEL: Which you have now overcome?

MADELEINE: Well, since you show none about *my* private affairs—

DANIEL: I see—if your wife has a lover, you should accept it as one accepts bad weather or the income-tax? Minor misfortunes that only dull people talk about?

MADELEINE: I at least have set you a good example in tact.

DANIEL: And I suppose the next thing you are going to tell me is that this letter is the excuse for your own unfaithfulness?

MADELEINE: I regard it as a duty to my sex to support the programme of equal rights.

DANIEL (*rising, with a touch of emotion*): But I have never been unfaithful to you—never.

MADELEINE: I think you must be forgetting. The letter contains some passages both of reminiscence and anticipation.

DANIEL (*moving up L. then down R. to Madeleine*): I tell you I know nothing about such a letter—nothing!

MADELEINE: It has your name on the envelope.

DANIEL: There is an envelope? Good! Then the postmark should give—

MADELEINE (*interrupting on "postmark"*): There is no postmark. It was evidently sent by hand. Quite right, too. It is the sort of letter one would hesitate to entrust to the post.

DANIEL: I presume it is signed?

[*He is L. of Madeleine who is seated on chaise.*]

MADELEINE: The lady's name is Leda.

DANIEL (*with a baffled headshake*): Leda? Leda?

MADELEINE: Perhaps you will remember her better if I tell you that she addresses you as "my swan".

DANIEL (*it comes to him*): Ah!

MADELEINE (*imitating*): Ah! I presume the name was not bestowed on you because you were a graceful swimmer.

DANIEL: Let me assure you that Leda was long before your time.

MADELEINE: The expressions are, as I say, quite modern.

DANIEL: Our language has not undergone any profound changes in a year and a half—the time you and I have been married.

MADELEINE: It so happens that Leda makes a reference to me.

DANIEL: To you?

MADELEINE: She hopes that your wife will soon go to visit her aunt in the country *and*—spend the night there.

DANIEL: That doesn't mean *you*. That was Valentine.

MADELEINE: I have an aunt who lives in the country

DANIEL: Every wife has an aunt who lives in the country. (*Moving a pace to C. below desk*) Certainly Valentine had.

MADELEINE: She says "little wife". Valentine is *not little*.

DANIEL: That is just an expression. Anyway she *is* comparatively little. You've never seen her.

MADELEINE: No, but I dislike her as much as if we'd been friends for years. When I think what she did to you.

DANIEL (*breaking in*): Oh, you think you have an exclusive right to treat me badly?

MADELEINE: I am sorry, Daniel, I was a devoted wife. I loved you. I proposed to go *on* loving you *indefinitely*—until Leda struck her blow.

DANIEL (*with sudden determination*): Listen: you may *not want* to meet Valentine, but you're damn well *going* to. (*Moving to above desk*) She will tell you that she knows all about this absurd episode. (*As he speaks he goes with decision to the desk and picks up the phone*) Hello.

MADELEINE: I don't know why you are making all this to do. You have already told me that you want a divorce.

DANIEL (*in phone*): Opera, six, seven, two, six . . . that is right, thank you. (*He turns to Madeleine in a lofty manner, phone in hand*) I do not like to have my word doubted. To you, that may seem absurdly squeamish, but if you have always been known as a truthful person—

MADELEINE (*rising—she moves to him near desk then up to R. and back to stool*): After reading Leda's

letter your honesty toward *whichever* of your wives was concerned—hardly seems a subject about which to swell out your chest.

DANIEL (*bending slightly*) (*In phone*): Hello, Madame Valentine Bachelet, please . . . Monsieur Bachelet . . . thank you.

MADELEINE: I don't like to make you embarrass yourself to the encumbrance.

DANIEL: I beg pardon?

MADELEINE: "The encumbrance"—that is what we have always called her. (*She sits on stool R. of desk. Her back is turned to Daniel.*)

DANIEL (*in phone*): Hello? Is that the encumb—sorry, is that Valentine? . . . This is Daniel . . . (*He evidently has a poor connection*) Daniel . . . Yes, *your* voice sounds very faint, too . . . Daniel, D for divorce, A for alimony, N for never again—That's right, Daniel. How are you? . . . Oh yes, wonderful—no complaints about business—you can sell anything nowadays . . . Listen, Valentine, I would like you to do me a favour. Would you mind coming round to the shop . . . Limoges? No, I've rather dropped enamels since I lost the benefit of your expert opinion . . . It is something quite different . . . Yes, in a way an antique . . . Thank you; when? . . . Yes, that will be splendid. The sooner the better. (*He hangs up receiver and moves down L. of desk.*)

MADELEINE: I'm surprised you didn't hang on to Valentine if she was so valuable to you. Why don't you have her back? As it is she has a share of the business.

DANIEL: That was unavoidable, since she was not only my wife, but my partner.

MADELEINE: A partner who does no work—a sleeping partner. And now since you are throwing out your *other* sleeping partner—

DANIEL (*moving to shop up R.*): Hardly "throwing

out". Put it that I have a prejudice against sharing my sleeping partners—even intermittently.

MADELEINE: Not very modern, are you?

DANIEL (*moving down R. of chaise*): You mustn't expect modernity in an antique dealer.

MADELEINE: You are unwilling to balance my lover against your Leda?

DANIEL: I am going to prove to you that Leda is a thing of the past.

MADELEINE: Supposing I tell you my lover is the same?

DANIEL: It must be a very recent past.

MADELEINE: The past is past—yesterday's newspaper as much as last year's novel.

DANIEL: Are you suggesting that last night's meeting was a scene of parting? That's too bad—it leaves you with no one to go to.

MADELEINE: True.

DANIEL (*sitting on chaise with his back to Madeleine*): On the other hand, you can hardly expect me to sit down patiently and wait until you find yourself a new lover.

MADELEINE: It might not require as much patience as all that—I shall have to think. I'm the sort of woman who needs a man in her life.

DANIEL: Sometimes even two.

MADELEINE (*paying no attention to the gibe*): I wish you'd help me with the choice. Let's think—Lambrissac—no-o. Brusson? I don't think so . . . Ah, Gabriel!

DANIEL: Good God!

MADELEINE: What do you think of Gabriel? It's high time he were getting married, and perhaps if you'd stretch a point and give me a good reference—

DANIEL: I can't imagine what you'd want Gabriel for.

MADELEINE: For the same things I wanted *you* for,

of course—I know he admires me. I can tell by the way he looks at me when I'm not looking at *him*.

DANIEL: You talk as if this whole thing were a joke.

MADELEINE: I'm trying to be brave about it. It's certainly not very funny to be shown the door by your husband without being given a chance to defend yourself.

DANIEL (*rises—stands with arms folded*): Defend yourself, then—I'll give you *every* chance. Tell me you've not been unfaithful—*prove it* to me!

MADELEINE (*rising, meeting Daniel's challenging gaze*): Why should I? I'm a proud woman, Daniel. When I take up the role of wife or lover, I want to be the star—not a member of a mob scene. (*She moves up R.*)

DANIEL (*moving to her up R.*): Mob scene? What are you talking about?

MADELEINE (*crossing down to chaise*) (*With a wave of the hand*): Your Valentines and your Ledas and heaven knows how many more there are . . . You didn't seem to remember Leda very well . . . Probably there were others—Andromedas and Atalantas—a Europa, perhaps, who addressed you as “my darling bull” . . . (*She sits on end of chaise.*)

DANIEL (*moving angrily to L. up stage*): How many times do I have to tell you—oh! what's the use?—

MADELEINE: Oh, do stop pacing about—you're as restless as a windscreen-wiper!

DANIEL (*stopping*): I'm sorry. (*Comes down L. of her.*)

[*He breaks off as a man of about 50 enters, coming from the shop. He wears a derby hat, which he neglects to remove, as he begins to inspect various objects up C., after which he moves down L. He is the Baron de Charancay. He inspects the escritoire in which Madeleine says she found the letter. He pulls out a drawer and looks at it in a critical way. They both watch the Baron curiously.*]

MADELEINE (*to Daniel*): A somnambulist. (*Confidentially*) It's a pity he didn't buy it before I found the letter.

BARON (*examining escritoire, his back to them*): Eighteenth century?

DANIEL: Late eighteenth.

BARON (*without turning*): Quite nice—expensive?

DANIEL: Thirty thousand francs.

MADELEINE: It has a romantic air about it, don't you think?

BARON (*turns—looking at Madeleine*): Romantic? Oh yes, I see what you mean. (*The Baron is completely fascinated by Madeleine's voice and appearance.*)

MADELEINE: 'Those pigeon-holes were not made to hold *business* correspondence.

BARON: No, no, indeed!

MADELEINE: One suspects there are secret drawers.

BARON: Yes, indeed—quite possible.

MADELEINE: On it Marie Walewska may well have penned a love-letter to Napoleon.

BARON: Why not?

MADELEINE: Or Marie Antoinette to Count Fersen.

BARON (*dreamily*): Yes—yes— (*Sniffing the escritoire*) There's an aroma of the past—an aura, as you might say—

MADELEINE (*moving to desk and sitting on the end of it*): It might even have been the desk on which Heloise poured out her heart to Abelard.

DANIEL (*disgustedly*): Hardly. They lived in the time of the Crusades. (*Moving up R.*)

BARON: M'm—well, I'll tell you; I've got to give someone a present.

MADELEINE: A wedding present?

BARON: On the contrary; a separation present.

[*Daniel turns.*]

MADELEINE: Oh, in that case nothing could be too good.

BARON: No—one wants to leave a good impression, of course. It's one's last chance.

MADELEINE: That's true. (*Turns to Daniel*) Don't you agree?

DANIEL (*who has moved down R. of Madeleine*): And one might be so glad to see the last of the lady that expense would be no object.

BARON: On the other hand, supposing you find you've lost a treasure? Not much fun to think you threw in a handsome present to make the bargain even better for the next fellow.

MADELEINE: And of course you have to think of where you're turning to next. Courtship is an expensive business—a very expensive business. (*As if unconsciously she adjusts a handsome watch bracelet she wears on her arm.*)

BARON: Yes, yes, indeed, there is a thought there—quite a thought.

[*He eyes Madeleine as he speaks. She accepts his admiring appraisal smilingly. As it continues, she starts to laugh.*]

MADELEINE: Perhaps you would like to find a present in the mood of advance rather than retreat? Something to earmark for future use?

BARON (*still eyeing Madeleine*): Frankly, for the lady I might have in mind, I don't see anything here that is quite good enough.

DANIEL (*who has had more than enough of this*): Are you interested in the *escritoire*?

BARON: Beg pardon? Ah, yes, the *escritoire*. (*He turns his gaze on it with reluctance*) Well, not just at the moment—I'll think it over. It isn't that I don't think it's worth the price—

MADELEINE: But you're wondering now if the lady is—?

BARON: Yes, it's strange how these moods come to us. You go into a shop fully determined to buy

something beautiful, and then suddenly you realise that the *most* beautiful things are not to be bought with money—at least, only *partly*. (*Turning back up C. he speaks to Daniel.*)

[*Madeleine moves L. slightly.*]

But I'll pop in again and have another look at it when I have more time . . . The name is Baron de Charançay. (*Turns to Madeleine*) Thirty-nine bis, Avenue Malikoff. (*Starts to look round as if searching for something.*)

DANIEL: What is it?

BARON: My hat.

MADELEINE (*laughing*): You're still wearing it.

BARON: A thousand pardons. Au revoir.

[*He bows, removing his hat with something of a flourish, turns and goes off.*]

DANIEL (*moves to Madeleine, who is slightly L. of C.*) (*In a bitter undertone*): Why don't you take his arm and go with him?

MADELEINE: That would be rushing things a bit, don't you think?

DANIEL: So that is the way you behave with strange men? You would never have dared let me see before, but now that I know what you are—

MADELEINE (*meeting Daniel challengingly*): What am I?

DANIEL: Do you want the Biblical word for it?

MADELEINE: I don't know what you're getting so worked up about. Those veins on your forehead— (*She touches Daniel's temple with her fingers.*)

DANIEL: Leave my veins alone. (*He moves up R.*)

MADELEINE: After all, I'm only trying to find someone who will relieve you from having to buy oats for a horse which is no longer in your stable . . . (*She shrugs, raising one hand in a gesture of resigned acceptance*) Well, I must go and see about my

packing. (*She moves up a pace, and takes latchkey from her bag, places it on desk*) Heigh-ho! I shan't be wanting this any more. (*She moves to arch, L.*)
DANIEL: Wait.

[*Madeleine turns as Daniel moves to her up L.*]

Where are you proposing to move to?

MADELEINE: To Jeanne Belin's.

DANIEL: Can she give you a decent bed?

MADELEINE: No, but there's a little sofa in her living room . . . Of course I'd be more comfortable at a hotel, only that might be expensive.

DANIEL: I find this constant concern of yours about my pocket book as irritating as it is unusual. (*Moving to desk, he sits at it.*)

MADELEINE: But you must be sensible—I may be on your hands for several months . . . However, I promise I won't be a *permanent* millstone, like Valentine.

DANIEL: My responsibility toward Valentine ceases when she re-marries. (*He looks at her.*)

MADELEINE: A fine hope you have there, my boy! I hear your Valentine wears spectacles and flat-heeled shoes and that her hair looks like a last year's bird's nest. (*Moving down to above desk.*)

DANIEL: Nonsense! She's extremely *soignée*, and possesses perfect taste. Your informant must have been speaking of a *different* Valentine.

MADELEINE (*as if not listening*): I would *prefer* a hotel, but it's not very nice for a woman to have to go to a hotel alone—you are talked about, and stared at. (*She moves down R. of chaise.*)

DANIEL: And I know how you object to be stared at.

MADELEINE (*still ignoring him and continuing as if thinking aloud*): It's really a pity that I haven't a lover now. (*Moving R. of desk near stool.*)

DANIEL: You mean, if you had, you'd go to a hotel with *him*?

MADELEINE: It would have looked better, wouldn't it? More respectable.

DANIEL: *Respectable?*

MADELEINE: Yes—this way I would have to register as *your* wife, and of course people would say, "Hello, what's this? She's left her husband." And then someone else would say: "There must be something the matter with the fellow. His wives are *always* leaving him—in droves." And the ugly rumours will start—a satyr, a sadist, a *Swan* . . . No, I shall have to sleep on Jeanne's sofa, even if two of the springs *are* broken. (*She again turns towards arch L.*)

DANIEL: The springs are broken?

MADELEINE: Oh, don't worry, it would be considered a beauty rest by one of those Indian fakirs who sleep on spikes. (*She is on step of archway.*)

DANIEL (*violently*): It's impossible. It's out of the question!

MADELEINE: Then what do you suggest?

DANIEL: You must sleep here.

MADELEINE: Daniel!

DANIEL: Now don't misunderstand me. I'm not weakening on my resolve to get a divorce.

MADELEINE: But you want me to have a nice, *comfortable* divorce?

DANIEL: I wish to settle everything as fast as possible. .

MADELEINE: Then I must certainly start to plan my future. And you will help me, won't you? I'm *sure* you will. This kind concern of yours about my bed proves it . . . Think of it—we're already on our way to becoming friends. Let's be friends, Daniel! (*She takes his right hand and shakes it*) They say that it's easier to be the enemy of your lover than his friend, but now that we're no longer sweet-hearts, it changes the picture completely—I hope you're going to be happy, Daniel.

DANIEL (*solemnly*): Thank you.

MADELEINE: Happier than I have made you.

DANIEL: You made me very happy—excepting when you were making me very miserable.

MADELEINE: Thank you. That's generous of you. And generosity begets generosity—I even forgive you your Leda—

DANIEL (*flaring up and moving C. a few paces*): But I tell you—

MADELEINE (*holding up her hand to stop him*): What does it matter? We're going to get a divorce, a friendly divorce.

DANIEL (*turning from her*): You might ask Henriette to have a bed made up for me here in this room. (*Crosses to R. of desk.*)

MADELEINE: Oh, not for you, for me.

[*Daniel turns.*]

I'm not going to let you make yourself uncomfortable. I know how you like a double bed.

[*She goes off into the living quarters L., up the stairs.*]

[*Daniel sits at his desk and drops his head into his hands. He sits like this for a moment, then draws his hands down over his face.*]

DANIEL (*turning back into the room*): Does she love me at all, or doesn't she? Is there any truth in her story, or isn't there? If there were only someone I could ask—someone whose feelings aren't concerned as mine are— (*He sits on stool down stage end.*)

[*As Daniel speaks, his shop-assistant, Blandinet, comes from the shop. He is a young man with untidy hair and an over-serious expression. None the less he has charm, and at times shows evidence of a dry humour. He carries a painting with him, the front of which is not yet displayed to the audience. He places the picture above the head of the chaise longue.*]

BLANDINET: I beg pardon, monsieur—

DANIEL: I was talking to myself—a habit that seems to be growing on me.

BLANDINET: It's the spring, monsieur . . . I do the same in the spring. It's the time when all nature is disturbed—waking up after the winter.

DANIEL: I'm waking up all right.

BLANDINET: There was a woman here asking for you who has a picture to sell. She calls it a Toulouse-Lautrec. (*He moves up to arch R.*)

DANIEL: You know that I don't deal in modern paintings.

BLANDINET: So I told her, monsieur, but she says that she's an old friend.

DANIEL: Oh, one of those. I suppose she bought a candlestick from me ten years ago. All right, Blandinet, put it down there. I'll look at it presently.

BLANDINET: She will be back in half an hour.

[*Blandinet deposits the picture above desk, but again without displaying it either to the audience or to Daniel. As he turns to go R., Daniel calls him.*]

DANIEL: Oh, Blandinet!

BLANDINET: Yes, monsieur?

DANIEL: I have a complaint about you. (*He starts to fish among the letters on his desk.*)

BLANDINET (*turning, shocked*): A complaint, monsieur? What have I *done*?

DANIEL: I've had a letter from that lady to whom we sold the Regence commode—Madame Lucien Prévost. She says: (*reading from the letter*) "In one of the drawers I found a large spider with hairy legs . . ."

BLANDINET (*moving down R. a pace or two*): Oh, my epeira! I have searched everywhere for her!

DANIEL: Well, if you call on Madame Prévost, she will doubtless return your girl-friend to you. It

appears she is superstitious about killing spiders, and so shut up the drawer and is afraid to open it.
BLANDINET: I will go there on my way home. The epeira is quite rare. (*Moves towards shop R.*)

DANIEL (*rises from stool—moves L. and sits at desk*): I wish you would try not to get your hobby mixed up with my business.

BLANDINET (*coming down R. of desk*): I'm sorry, but you see, monsieur, I had found this spider in a shipment of old furniture. It is so that I frequently discover my specimens. It is one of the reasons I like working in an antique shop.

DANIEL: Tell me—is it true that the female spider always destroys her lover?

BLANDINET: Unless he escapes quickly enough.

DANIEL: Ah!

BLANDINET: Before he approaches her, he stretches a thread from the female's web to a neighbouring branch.

DANIEL: A road of arrival and departure?

BLANDINET: It is his only hope. The female is infinitely stronger and completely ruthless. It is so throughout the entire insect world.

DANIEL: Why bother to say "insect"?

BLANDINET: Unlike most spiders, this one does not devour her mate immediately.

DANIEL: No.

BLANDINET: No, she paralyses him by one bite of her powerful jaws, and leaves him to be eaten by her progeny.

DANIEL: That is certainly making the punishment fit the crime.

BLANDINET (*kneeling on stool, he leans over to Daniel, speaking excitedly*): In the early stages of the amorous meeting, the male may well be deceived by the tenderness with which he is received. She flirts and plays, inviting him to swing with her on a long thread, when she holds him quite gently in her arms.

DANIEL (*outraged*): And all the time she is planning—My God! And we complain that we can't trust *ours!* .

BLANDINET: Of course she is three times as large as he is.

DANIEL: Thank Heaven, *that* at least is not true!

BLANDINET: With many creatures, monsieur, love is a kind of warfare—

[*The shop bell is heard off R.*] .

Ah! there's a customer— .

[*He hurries off to the shop.*]

[*Daniel's mood of depression has returned. He heaves a sigh, moves up C. to table—looks at Madeleine's photograph there, then turns to move L., glances at picture as he passes, then returns to have another look at the painting and examines it up C. for a moment. He steps back.*]

DANIEL: My God! (*He seems stunned—stares a moment, then moves the picture into a better light on chair down L.*) My . . . God!

[*A woman appears in arch R. She is about sixty, with carrotty hair and much made-up eyes. In fact, she looks just like a Toulouse-Lautrec picture. This is Julie Bille-en-Bois.*]

JULIE: Good morning, monsieur.

DANIEL (*turning slightly, hardly seeing her*): Oh—good morning, madame.

JULIE: You recognise it, eh?

DANIEL (*still gazing at picture*): I certainly do.

JULIE: But I'll bet you don't recognise the model—Germaine Buffard, known as Julie Bille-en-Bois, dancer at the Moulin Rouge—one of the stars of the famous Quadrille.

DANIEL: *I* remember.

JULIE: Yes, sir, that's me.

DANIEL (*turns, sees Julie, stares at her*): Well, I'll be damned—! (*He is slightly L. of C., his back to audience, at corner of desk.*)

JULIE: It's no good looking at *me* if you want to see Julie Bille-en-Bois. Look at *that*. (*Points to picture*) All that's left now are the gloves and the boa. I kept them as a souvenir of the old days, and I put them on to-day as proofs of identity.

DANIEL (*staring at her*): Oh!

JULIE: Coming back to you, is it? (*She moves to him.*)

DANIEL: Yes.

JULIE: Everything?

DANIEL: Yes. Everything.

[*He puts out his hand to Julie without looking at her. They are both below desk.*]

JULIE: I'm not surprised it didn't come easy. It's a long time ago, isn't it? You must have been about twenty-two, and I was thirty-four . . . and I was just like that . . . *exactly* like that, because it was the day after I met you that he finished the picture. Do you remember him?

DANIEL: Lautrec? I don't think I ever saw him.

JULIE: You'd remember him if you had. He stood about so high— (*Holds out her hand*) I say "so high", but really it ought to be "so low". But what a genius!

DANIEL: Ah!

JULIE: And a heart as big as he was small. Do you know what he did? He *gave* me that picture . . . But I don't want to take up your time, so I'll tell you why I'm here.

DANIEL: Do sit down, won't you?

JULIE: May I?

DANIEL: Of course—

[*Julie sits on chaise longue. Daniel sits on stool facing her.*]

But tell me, how did you know I was here?

JULIE: Oh, quite by chance. I saw you about three days ago outside the shop. I was coming along the street not thinking of anything, and suddenly you came out and shot past me, lickerty-split.

DANIEL: You recognised me?

JULIE: I thought I did. Wasn't quite sure. After all, it's a long time. So I went into the shop and asked the young squirt.

DANIEL: My shop assistant, Blandinet.

JULIE: Is that the young squirt's name?

DANIEL: Yes, and he's not such a gump as he looks. Knows a lot about spiders.

JULIE: Spiders!

DANIEL: I'm sorry—

JULIE: Well, I was in two minds about coming here, but this morning I said to myself, "Oh, the hell with it, he can't eat me!"

DANIEL: Of course not. It's the *female* who devours the male.

JULIE: What the devil does *that* mean?

DANIEL: Go on—pay no attention.

JULIE: So I tucked her under my arm and came over. (*She indicates the painting*) But your young man told me you weren't interested in modern paintings. And the way he said it! Like a constipated funeral mute!

DANIEL: I know that manner of Blandinet's. Very damping.

JULIE: It damped *me* all right, but as I had to be hanging around these parts anyway, I thought I'd take another pop.

DANIEL: I'm glad you did.

JULIE: Me, too. Because here we are, eh?

DANIEL (*friendly and tender*): Here we are.

[*There is a pause as they silently gaze at each other.*]

JULIE: Mind if I take a look?

DANIEL: I beg your pardon?

JULIE: At you. I want to have a good look at you. You don't object? (*She starts to fish her glasses out of her handbag and crosses to Daniel.*)

DANIEL: Go right ahead.

[*She puts her glasses on and scrutinises him.*]

JULIE (*lifting his chin, she examines his face. With a sigh*): Oh, the dirty devils! The years, I mean, damn them. What they don't do to one's face, eh? (*Putting her glasses away*) All the same, I'd know you anywhere. Yes, there's always something that remains. Difficult to say what. You know. Something that makes you say to yourself, "It's him!" Outside the shop that day I spotted your walk. Just now I remembered your voice. It's all coming back to me—your eyes, your hands, your skin—the only thing I'm damned if I can recollect is your name.

DANIEL: Daniel Bachelet.

JULIE (*moving a pace R.*): Daniel Bachelet? . . . Daniel? . . . Daniel? . . . I'll swear I never used to call you Daniel.

DANIEL (*shyly*): No, you called me—Jo-jo.

JULIE (*turning back to him—joyfully*): Jo-jo! That's right. Now I've got you tabbed. Now we're getting somewhere. You dirty dog, remember the day you pushed me into the lake at Enghien?

DANIEL: Do I?

JULIE: And that night at the Quatz' Arts Ball?

DANIEL: I'll never forget it!

JULIE: And—all the rest of it? Not such bad old days, were they?

DANIEL: They certainly weren't.

JULIE: It was being in love that did it. And we *were* in love, eh?

DANIEL: I should say so!

JULIE: So should I say so! Why, it lasted nearly four

months! Oh dear, it seems such a long, long time ago, doesn't it? (*Sits on chaise.*)

[*They gaze at each other, remembering many things.*]

JULIE: And now you're running a shop for second-hand furniture— (*Holding up her hand*) Oh, I know, I know—antiques, very swanky business, one of the best in Paris. But tell me, with all this craze for the modern, are people still buying your hand-me-downs?

DANIEL: Well, what is modern has a way of soon becoming antique—I don't know if you've noticed.

JULIE: I've noticed it about myself all right.

DANIEL (*rises and moves L. above picture*): Your picture, Toulouse-Lautrec—he's *still* called one of the moderns, you know.

JULIE: That's what comes of being a painter, eh? People don't know you're alive until you're dead!

DANIEL: That's *one* way of hanging on to your youth.

JULIE: And Lautrec was old enough to be my father—if you can believe that of anyone . . . But now let's hear something about *you*. (*She rises, moves to R. of desk*) Are you married?

DANIEL: I've been married twice.

JULIE: I suppose they did the dirty on you?

DANIEL: One did.

JULIE: The wrong one, I suppose?

DANIEL: Yes, it's always that way—with the other it wouldn't have mattered.

JULIE: And now?

DANIEL: I'm getting a divorce—my second.

JULIE: Ah. Then you're back in circulation?

DANIEL: Well—

JULIE: Oh, don't be scared. (*Sits on stool, puts her bag on desk.*)

DANIEL: I'm not. But that's enough about me. How's the luck with you? (*Sits L. of desk.*)

JULIE: Terrible.

DANIEL: It'll change.

JULIE: It does. It keeps on changing and getting worse. All I have in the world is *her*. (*Points to picture.*)

DANIEL: In other words, you're reduced to a pretty sizeable fortune.

JULIE: I'll tell you something, Jo-jo. I'm down to my last two hundred francs. I've had to sell everything except my bed and my beauty. (*Pointing to picture.*) That's my beauty. My own closed up the shutters a long, long time ago. So these last weeks I've been sitting on the bed and staring at the beauty, like someone reading over their old love letters. Do you want a good laugh?

DANIEL: I should be most grateful for one. They aren't coming my way much these days.

JULIE: Then you should drop in one of these mornings and watch me putting on my make-up. I shove the mirror by the side of the picture, and then start trying to make myself look like it. Lautrec used to glare at me when he was painting me, and now I glare at the picture when I'm making up. He's the model now, and I'm the painting. Come on, Jo-jo, be a sport. Buy me. Buy me as I was thirty years ago.

DANIEL (*taking two thousand franc notes from R. drawer of desk*): No, hang on to it a bit longer—and come and see me every month. (*He takes her hand-bag and slips notes into it.*)

JULIE (*in distress*): But I didn't want *that*.

DANIEL: Well, you're going to get it. But I'll tell you. I'll sell the picture if I can get a good price for it. Anyway, leave it with me for twenty-four hours, so that I can get it photographed. You can take it back to-morrow.

JULIE: All right, if you say so. Any idea what it's worth?

DANIEL: Quite a lot. If you'll wait, I'll tell you.

[*He takes receiver and asks for number, Etoile 3648.*]

JULIE: Are you phoning one of the nibs?

DANIEL: One of the very leading nibs, and an honest nib, which all nibs aren't. He's the best man in Paris to go to about a Lautrec. (*Into phone*) Hello? Scheller? Oh, Leon, how are you? Daniel Bachelet speaking. I'd like a word with your father . . . Thank you . . . (*To Julie*) I hope your little friend Lautrec is listening in to this. It will make him preen his wings, if he's wearing wings.

JULIE (*seriously*): He's wearing wings.

DANIEL (*speaking into telephone*): Oh, hello, Scheller . . . Fine, thanks. And you? Splendid. Tell me, old man, what ought one to get for a particularly good Lautrec in excellent condition? . . . Between four and five hundred thousand . . . ?

JULIE (*astounded*): My God! My God!

DANIEL: Yes—it's signed, and in my opinion a better picture than his Jeanne Avril. Thanks. Au revoir. (*He hangs up receiver.*)

JULIE (*in a daze*): Between four and five hundred thousand francs?

DANIEL: That's what he said.

JULIE: And Lautrec made me a present of it! I'll say you had better keep it. It isn't safe in that old rat-trap I live in.

DANIEL: I'll see that it's insured.

JULIE: Thanks. (*Looks in her bag*) Shall I give you back what you just gave me?

DANIEL: Don't be silly. (*He rises.*)

JULIE: Then I'll take it as an advance on the sale of the picture.

DANIEL: Nonsense. (*Leaning over desk, he puts his hands on her shoulders*) It's a present from an old friend. Where are you living now?

JULIE: 23 rue de la Butte-aux-Cailles.

DANIEL (*writes address on pad*): Are you on the phone?

JULIE: Eh?

DANIEL: Are you on the phone?

JULIE: No, I'm on my uppers. Do I look like someone who could afford a phone? But if you want to call me, give them a buzz at the pub next door. Galvani 41-22. They're very decent, they'll give me the message.

DANIEL: Galvani—

JULIE: 41-22.

[*He makes a note of it.*]

(*Rising and moving up R. nearer shop*) Well, the right colour cat certainly crossed my path to-day.

DANIEL: I'd be glad if I could say the same. (*Moving up L. slightly.*)

JULIE: I wish there were something I could do for you, Jo-jo.

DANIEL: There isn't.

JULIE: No, that's another thing age does for a woman. When you're young and good-looking, you've got something to give . . . Tell me, this wife of yours that you're divorcing—is she pretty?

DANIEL: Adorably pretty.

JULIE: H'm . . . Anything here? (*Taps her head.*)

DANIEL: Plenty there—too much.

JULIE: You don't mean one of those man-brains?

DANIEL: No; decidedly not a man's brain. (*Moving down a pace.*)

JULIE: Does she think she's in love with this other fellow?

DANIEL: There is no other fellow.

JULIE: *What?*

DANIEL: Not any longer—at least, that's what she says. It was pique, revenge—a gesture of wounded pride— (*Moving down to desk chair.*)

JULIE: Oh, you'd been doing the dirty on her? (*Comes down slightly.*)

DANIEL: No, I hadn't—never. But she found a love letter—an old one—but she thought it was a new one—

JULIE: You haven't learned to burn them, at *your* age?

DANIEL: This one was stuck in the back of a drawer. (*He indicates the piece of furniture.*)

JULIE: Bad luck. And there was nothing to date the letter?

DANIEL: Nothing. And so I'm sending for my first wife to tell my present wife that the episode occurred during her régime.

JULIE (*plumping down on stool R. of desk*): You've done *what*?

DANIEL: I know, you think it's odd, as long as we're divorcing. But I don't intend to let my wife have this justification—

JULIE: Which wife are we talking about? Oh yes, the second one—I'm following you . . . And what about the justification it gives your *first* wife? Or I suppose that doesn't matter any more?

DANIEL: She's under some obligation—I've been very generous with her . . . Of course, if she *read* the letter, it might be a bit of a shock to her—

JULIE: Let me give you a bit of advice, my boy. Don't tell number one that the letter *really* belongs to her reign. Let her think she's helping you put one over on wife number two—

DANIEL: Valentine's not a malicious woman—

JULIE: You poor little fellow! There's nothing that so awakens the maternal instinct in a woman as seeing a man dealing with *other* women—as I look at you I feel tears pricking at my eyelids . . . But, tell me: do you think number two really *did* do the dirty on you?

DANIEL: She told me so herself.

JULIE: Well, you know what liars we women are.

DANIEL: Nice of you to stick up for her. (*He moves slightly L.*)

JULIE: May I say something?

DANIEL: Anything you please.

JULIE: Well, don't you think you're making much too heavy weather over a trifle?

DANIEL: A *trifle*?

JULIE: It's not going to kill you. Men make too much fuss about all that sort of thing. Of course I admit *we* help. We want 'em to think our virtue is all important: it's the only commodity we have to sell. (*Moving down R. slightly.*)

DANIEL: It's killed my happiness all right. Happiness! What a strange thing is the happiness that has never really existed, but can suddenly cease to exist!

JULIE: Well, anyway, you're not sure, so why not give her the benefit of the doubt. I'll tell you something, Jo-jo—it's the same with women as it is with religion or a restaurant hash. You've got to take 'em on faith, or else do without. (*She rises and picks up bag and boa from table*) Well, I'm off—

DANIEL: I'll see what I can do about the picture.

JULIE (*taking his arm and moving up R.*): Thank you, Jo-jo; you're an angel . . . Any girl is lucky to have you . . . And if, as you say, this wife of yours has plenty up here— (*Taps forehead*) she *knows* it.

DANIEL: You're a good sort yourself—since we're exchanging compliments.

JULIE: I'll wait until I hear from you. (*They shake hands.*)

DANIEL: Yes, give me a few days.

[*Julie looks at the portrait for a long moment.*]

JULIE (*softly*): Good bye, my daughter.

[*Exit Julie.*]

[*Daniel looks after her. He turns and goes to the picture. He stands looking at it, studying it for a while, then places it above the escritoire L. Voices are heard off.*]

VALENTINE (*off*): Where is monsieur? . . . Don't bother. I know the way. Monsieur Bachelet is expecting me.

[*Daniel, apparently lost in his thoughts, turns from the picture, but not towards the shop entrance. Valentine enters, and the audience gets a good chance to look at her before Daniel sees her. She is exactly like Madeleine's description—spectacles, flat-heeled shoes, hair messy, clothes nondescript.*]

Well, here I am. (*She is up stage R. of C.*)

[*Daniel turns and gets his shock.*]

DANIEL: Good God!

VALENTINE: Beg pardon?

DANIEL: What on earth—! (*He cuts off his speech.*)

VALENTINE (*moving down L. of chaise, then over to table R., examines objets d'art*): Well, the place doesn't seem to have changed very much. (*Looks round*) And you've still got quite a lot of the old junk that should have been sold ages ago—would have been, if I'd been here. (*She has circled chaise, and is now L. of it.*)

DANIEL (*unable to repress it*): What are you made up for, Valentine?

VALENTINE: I'm *not* made up. That's the point. I've *stopped* making up.

DANIEL: Why?

VALENTINE: For years I struggled to be glamorous—wasted precious hours with my face in mud-packs or hot towels when I might have been improving my mind—

DANIEL: Is that what you're doing now?

VALENTINE: Exactly. I've been devoting myself to poetry. I find I have some gift for writing it—I don't know whether you saw some lines of mine in "The Gardener's Journal"—(*She sits on chaise and takes press cutting from her handbag.*)

DANIEL: Sorry. I am not much interested in gardening. (*Moves L.*)

VALENTINE: But I think you will be interested in this little poem. It has a special significance that I fancy you will recognise. It's called simply "To Him".

DANIEL (*pointing to himself*): You mean—?

VALENTINE (*starting to recite*):

Why has the crimson left those lips you knew
And feasted on in that enchanted hour?

[*Daniel goes up, muttering "My God!"*]

Why can my heart no more its warmth renew
Since tossing me aside—

DANIEL: Well, of all the—

VALENTINE:

—a withered flower,

You left—and took the heaven you brought away
As Jove departing from Danae's bower—

DANIEL (*coming down L. of desk to down stage corner of it*): Please! Please! And may I remind you that it was you who did the tossing aside? You thought you had fallen in love with a wealthy Argentinian with a patent-leather hair-do—

VALENTINE: I saw it was a mistake—

DANIEL: You saw the mistake as soon as you put on your glasses? Or perhaps *he* put on *his* glasses first?

VALENTINE: What do you mean?

DANIEL (*bursting forth*): It's damned unfair—that's what I mean! (*Crossing over to her near chaise.*)

VALENTINE: Unfair? What's unfair?

DANIEL: The way *you* look. Until you marry again, you are a partner in this business. What chance do you think there is of your marrying again when you go round looking like that?

VALENTINE: Oh, that's it? You want me to re-marry?

DANIEL: Naturally—it's disgraceful of an ex-wife to let herself go and just settle back comfortably on her alimony Everyone condemns a *wife* who tosses the bait aside once she's landed the fish—but this is worse! (*He moves angrily up R.*)

VALENTINE (*rising and following him up R.*): And of course you don't care *who* or *what* I marry, so long as I'm off your hands?

DANIEL: That's not true. I want you to have a good life—a good home.

[*Daniel moves down R. of chaise. Valentine moves with him L. of it.*]

VALENTINE: "A good home"—Just the phrase one uses about an unwanted cat!

DANIEL: You're not even wearing the jewellery I gave you.

VALENTINE (*vaguely*): Jewellery?

DANIEL (*drily*): I seem to remember a valuable engagement ring that you tore off during our final scene and flung—on to your right hand.

VALENTINE (*kneeling on chaise*): It's all very well for you to talk like this. You men have only to keep yourselves attractive *inside*—but you expect us women to do both an inside and an outside job.

DANIEL: All right—let it go. (*He goes up R. and down again to L. of chaise on which Valentine now sits on up stage end*) But now I want to ask you something. I think you will admit that in every respect I have treated you with consideration and generosity?

VALENTINE: I've nothing to complain about where money's concerned.

DANIEL: I'm glad to hear you say so, because now I want *you* to do *me* a favour. (*He kneels.*)

VALENTINE (*suspiciously*): Oh? What is that?

DANIEL (*pointing to it*): You remember that *es-critoire*?

VALENTINE: Very well. A Regence piece. We bought it at the de Grammont sale—forty thousand francs—a giveaway.

DANIEL (*looks off L., then bends down to Valentine*): In one of the drawers Madeleine found a love-letter.

VALENTINE: What *sort* of love-letter? I mean, *who* wrote it to *whom*?

DANIEL: It was written by a woman—to *me*.

VALENTINE: So! (*She laughs.*)

[*Daniel rises.*]

Poor Madeleine! And poor Daniel—is she giving you a bad time of it? (*Laughs*) Well, well, old boy, you don't seem to have gained very much by changing that record!

DANIEL: I want you to be good enough to tell Madeleine that you know all about the affair, that the letter was written during the period of our marriage, yours and mine.

VALENTINE: I *see*. In other words, you want me to help you pull the wool over your wife's eyes?

DANIEL: When you and I parted, we said that we would always remain friends.

VALENTINE: And you consider it one of the duties of friendship to help an erring husband conceal his amours from his lawful wedded?

DANIEL: I realise that it is usually the wife that her women friends help in such emergencies . . . When a *man* is involved, you generally all gang up on him.

VALENTINE: There is such a thing as sex-loyalty.

DANIEL (*drily*): I have heard women *use* the expression.

VALENTINE: However, since Madeleine is no friend of mine, I don't know why I *shouldn't* help you.

DANIEL: Then you *will*?

VALENTINE: Very well. But you'll have to give me

one or two facts to go on. Your girl-friend's name for instance.

DANIEL: The letter is signed "Leda".

VALENTINE: L-e-d-a?

[*Daniel nods.*]

As in Leda and the Swan?

[*Daniel nods again.*]

Pardon me, Daniel, but aren't you getting a little *old* for that sort of thing?

DANIEL: I quite agree. This was the last of such adventures.

VALENTINE: You say "was"—

DANIEL: Oh yes; it ended *years* ago.

VALENTINE: Years ago? How many years ago? You were married to me up till—

DANIEL (*quickly*): Well, quite some *time* ago.

VALENTINE: I see. So now you have *no* woman in your life? . . . Except, of course, Madeleine.

DANIEL: No, no one . . . If you'll excuse me, I'll go and fetch her.

[*He goes L. towards living quarters, and turns. Valentine sits awkwardly tying her shoes. Daniel shudders at her eccentric appearance.*]

But you must really try to recapture your old time glamour, Valentine. I have a picture of you here— (*He taps his forehead*) as you were on our honeymoon, on that balcony in Deauville—

VALENTINE: We spent *our* honeymoon in Monte Carlo.

DANIEL: Of *course*! Stupid of me. But the places one goes to on one's honeymoon are all so much alike, aren't they? Balconies, moonlight, the murmur of the sea, champagne—

[*He exits through arch L., and goes up the staircase.*]

[*Valentine takes a thoughtful pace up and down. She takes off her glasses, puts them down on desk; she pulls her corset into position, first over left hip, then over right, and stands L. of chaise facing archway.*]

MADELEINE (*off*): I have told Henriette about making up a bed in here—

[*Madeleine enters down the stairs, followed by Daniel. She has changed to a ravishing house gown, and her manner is breezily cordial. She carries a small buttonhole flower.*]

MADELEINE: Ah, Madame Bachelet, good morning! (*Coming L. of desk.*)

VALENTINE: Good morning, Madame Bachelet.

DANIEL (*smiling uncomfortably*): You two have never met? (*He stands up C. between them.*)

MADELEINE: No, but I would have known Madame Bachelet *anywhere*. A friend of mine described her to me with such accuracy. (*Turning to Valentine again*) I was told that you have become a *littérateur*, Madame?

VALENTINE: I write a little poetry.

MADELEINE: How clever of you! *I'm* not at all clever, am I, Daniel?

DANIEL: If you will excuse me, I have a few minutes' business with Blandinet. (*He goes to stairs.*)

MADELEINE: Don't run away, Daniel. Madame Bachelet and I are not at all embarrassed—why should *you* be?

DANIEL: There's some new stock that I have to put a price on—

MADELEINE: Nonsense! (*Puts the flower in Daniel's coat—to Valentine*) For all his apparent Bohemianism, Daniel is really absurdly conventional. But then, I don't need to tell *you* anything about *him*!

VALENTINE (*smiling*): No—*hardly*!

[*They both laugh. Madeleine motions Valentine to sit on chaise; at the same time she sits in desk chair herself.*]

DANIEL: The reason I asked Valentine to come here—

MADELEINE (*overlapping his speech to which she pays no attention*): How do you think he's looking? A little older, of course. That's something none of us can help.

VALENTINE: I thought he appeared a trifle *tired*.

DANIEL: Never mind about me. I asked you here to—

MADELEINE (*paying no attention*): He had a bad night last night, so he tells me.

VALENTINE: "*Tells you?*"

MADELEINE: Yes; we share the same room as a rule—you know how he is about that?

VALENTINE: I do indeed!

MADELEINE (*with a little laugh*): He says he can't sleep unless he has a woman with him, poor silly boy!

VALENTINE: I know. I've heard him say it.

MADELEINE: And look at all the trouble *that's* got him into!

[*She laughs again. Valentine laughs.*]

You and me, for instance!

DANIEL: It is strange that they bring boys up to think of women as delicate-minded creatures.

MADELEINE: Don't be ridiculous, Daniel. Madame and I are women of the world.

DANIEL: Which a friend of mine once defined as a woman of the *half* world plus an independent income.

MADELEINE: Well, I don't know about our incomes being *independent*. What do *you* say, Valentine? I *may* call you Valentine, mayn't I?

VALENTINE: Certainly, Madeleine.

MADELEINE: After all, we've so much in common.
(*Waves a hand towards Daniel.*)

VALENTINE: Exactly!

MADELEINE: Like two runners in a relay race.

[*The shop-bell rings off.*]

DANIEL: Ah, there's a customer! I'm sure that neither of you ladies want me to neglect my business!

[*He exits quickly, R.*]

MADELEINE (*with a little shrug*): Perhaps it's just as well. Now we can talk freely.

VALENTINE: Yes; and I can tell you, as I couldn't before, that I don't think Daniel's looking at *all* well.

MADELEINE (*with a touch of frost*): Oh! Was he looking better when *you* had him?

VALENTINE: I used to take an absurd amount of care of him.

MADELEINE (*a bit stiffly*): Daniel is perfectly well. No one looks their best if they haven't slept all night.

VALENTINE: He's worried about something?

MADELEINE: A little domestic friction.

VALENTINE: In regard to a love-letter?

MADELEINE: Oh, did Daniel tell you?

VALENTINE (*rising—she kneels on stool R. of desk*): Yes, and let me reassure you—it was one of those silly letters from a silly woman—"Leda" I believe she called herself—

MADELEINE: Then Daniel *was* telling me the truth. It *was* in your time.

VALENTINE: Yes, *that* one was (*She moves R. to chaise, and sits.*)

MADELEINE: What do you mean—"that one was"?

VALENTINE: My dear, I'm older than you—by a year or two, and I've learned that the leopard doesn't change his spots.

MADELEINE: Tell me: when *you* married Daniel—

VALENTINE (*cutting in*): When I married him I knew it was in his blood—and always would be. I gave myself a year for the novelty to wear off, and for him to feel the need of an extra-marital thrill . . . Actually, it took fourteen months. (*She lies back on chaise.*)

MADELEINE: You could look at it as cold-bloodedly as that?

VALENTINE: With a man like Daniel it's the only way. (*As Madeleine doesn't answer*): Don't you agree?

MADELEINE: No; I was silly enough to think I could go on being *everything* to him—as *he* was to *me*.

VALENTINE (*sitting up*): But my dear, you're not so naïve as to fancy that it's on an even footing?

MADELEINE: Why not! If you're both equally in love?

VALENTINE: Surely you're familiar with all the old masculine arguments? Biology. The life force prodding them. They could have twelve children while we're having one . . . Nature urging women to cling to the one while it tells them to embrace the many?

MADELEINE: I don't want a man who thinks like that. I want a man who's *mine* exclusively—as much so as my tooth-brush.

VALENTINE: Then you shouldn't have married Daniel.

MADELEINE: Tell me—how did you find out about this Leda? Weren't you terrible upset when you *did*? Is that what broke you up?

VALENTINE: But I've just *told* you—I was *expecting* it. And that wasn't what broke us up. It took a lot more than that.

MADELEINE: *More*! How *could* there be *more*? Have you ever read any of Leda's letters?

VALENTINE: Yes. Erotic, passionate—I know!

Daniel inspires that sort of thing. It's probably the same with whoever he's got now.

MADELEINE: *Now?*

VALENTINE (*rises and crosses to stool—sits*): Tell me—does he still dash off letters by hand after dinner, and then rush out and post them?

MADELEINE: Yes.

VALENTINE: You don't look to see who they're to?

MADELEINE: To one of his agents. Or so he tells me.

VALENTINE: Yes, that's what it always was in *my* day, too! Of course I knew better, but I never said anything.

MADELEINE (*rises and moves up L. of C.*): I couldn't do that! I couldn't sit back and do nothing—accept it. If I really thought Daniel were untrue to me, I'd be wild—I'd want to get even.

VALENTINE: Well, that's not such a bad idea. Love and let love. It would make you take the whole thing much less seriously.

MADELEINE (*moving down near desk chair*): I tried it—not really—truly, only a *little*. But it's no use. I may not be a one-man woman, but I'm a one-man-at-a-time woman.

VALENTINE: Really? Well, now I must be going. (*Crossing to chaise for bag and gloves*) I'm lunching with a literary agent who says he'll handle my stuff—you ought to try poetry—a wonderful outlet for the emotions. Much safer than love. (*She goes to exit R.*)

MADELEINE (*absorbed in her thoughts*): Is it?

VALENTINE (*turning*): I'm glad I was able to put your mind at rest about that love-letter.

[*She exits.*]

[*Madeleine goes to the escritoire L., looks at it for a moment, then angrily bangs the lid of desk down. Crossing to desk, she discovers Valentine's glasses, picks them up, turns as if to follow her, meets Daniel who is re-entering.*]

DANIEL (*triumphantly*): So she has told you about the letter?

MADELEINE: Yes, she told me. (*Displaying them*) She left her glasses.

DANIEL: Just as well. She shouldn't be wearing them.

MADELEINE (*absently*): She sees better with them, I suppose. (*Moves down R. a pace.*)

DANIEL (*crosses to desk—places glasses on it. He stands near desk chair*): It isn't only her glasses—her hair, her whole appearance, her general attitude . . . She used to be attractive to men. After her Argentine fiasco, I gave her a year . . .

MADELEINE: Just what *she* gave *you*—

DANIEL: What do you mean?

MADELEINE (*again moving slightly down R.*): Nothing . . . How long have we been married—exactly? (*She starts to count on her fingers.*)

DANIEL: Twenty-one months, two weeks and three days.

MADELEINE: It must seem a long time to you!

DANIEL: Strangely enough—it doesn't.

MADELEINE (*moving up R. above chaise then down R. of it*): Well, if Valentine's not going to do anything about remarrying all the more reason for *me* to put *my* best face forward.

DANIEL: You talk as if you were in a hurry to get away.

MADELEINE: It was you who told me to get out.

DANIEL (*sitting at desk*): Since then I have told you to stay—for the present, that is . . . until we can make arrangements.

MADELEINE (*coming towards C.*): I've thought over your generous offer, and I think it would be better if I go at once—to-night.

DANIEL: To sleep on that sofa?

MADELEINE: The sofa doesn't matter—I don't suppose I shall sleep much, anyway. (*Moving up R.*)

DANIEL: Perhaps you've thought of somewhere *else* to go?

MADELEINE: No, but I shall put my mind to the problem immediately. I'll be off your payroll as soon as I've found somebody to my taste—and *yours*. (*She turns.*)

DANIEL: Somebody to *my* taste?

MADELEINE (*coming down, C., she sits on stool R. of desk, facing Daniel*): You *will* help me, won't you? I don't want to make another mistake . . . And you're so wise. From now on, I want to think of you as a sort of—father.

DANIEL: Father!

MADELEINE: Just like my own dear, dead father, who used to be so fond of me.

DANIEL: Frankly, I don't understand you. (*Turns arm wearily over chair.*)

MADELEINE: What's so difficult to understand? It is too much to ask you to vet my future husband?

DANIEL (*outraged*): You ask *me* to vet your future husband? You dare to suggest such a thing—?

MADELEINE (*rising and moving up L. towards arch*): Oh, he won't know. It will just be a secret between you and me. (*She stands on step to hallway.*)

DANIEL (*risks and follows her*): Where are you going?

MADELEINE: To pack my trunk. (*She starts to go.*)

DANIEL: Madeleine!

[*She turns.*]

Once and for all, was this story about the Big Wheel true?

MADELEINE: No; it was a complete lie.

[*She goes up the staircase.*]

[*Daniel goes up to window C. near table where there is a photograph of Madeleine. He picks it up, stares at it, comes down C. and throws it in the waste-paper basket, then changes his mind, and still holding it in*

his hand, having picked it out of the basket, moves down L. and speaks to the audience.]

DANIEL (*after he has moved chair from L. wall nearer C., he sits*): Of course I *knew* it was a lie from the first, but I've been fighting against it, hoping against hope. *Why?* I suppose that's fairly obvious—I'm in love with the creature—God help me! And if nearly two years of marriage can't cure you of love, what can? I'm sorry, ladies, *if you're listening*—I realise that's a very cynical remark—but it's true, none the less. Marriage isn't a process for prolonging the life of love, but for mummifying its corpse— But oh, if you love them, how they can torture you, these women! Torture you with doubt and suspicion! You can't be with them all the time. Sometimes, because of wars or what not, you are parted for quite long periods. You mustn't listen to this, ladies! You really *mustn't* (*Puts picture on escritoire. Whispering*) The Crusaders, gentlemen, they *had* something. The husband ordered his clothes from the blacksmith, and his wife's from the locksmith . . . but even then a proverb was started—something about love laughing—and once again man was defeated. The woman always wins. There's a motto to put in your hats, gentlemen. And if it's true with a man and a woman, as it is with the insects, that love is a kind of warfare—what chance have we men got? A bunch of home-guardsmen against trained professional soldiers! For love is of man's life a thing apart, 'tis woman's whole existence . . .

[He breaks off as Blandinet enters R., coming in while he is still speaking.]

BLANDINET: I beg pardon, sir?

DANIEL: You see, I'm doing it again, Blandinet.

BLANDINET: Yes, sir.

DANIEL: I was merely repeating what you said to me just now about love being war—

BLANDINET: Well, sir, I didn't mean—

DANIEL (*overriding him forcefully*): War! From the first sidelong glance of desire to the last sigh of satiety!

BLANDINET: Yes, monsieur.

DANIEL: My advice to you is get married and stay married.

BLANDINET: Really, monsieur!

DANIEL: Love is like life insurance, Blandinet. The older you are when you start it, the more it costs—and not only in money, either.

BLANDINET: I see, monsieur. (*Coughs deprecatingly*) I wanted to ask you, monsieur—is it to-morrow that the accountants are coming in?

DANIEL (*abstractedly*): To-morrow? No—at least, I don't think so. No.

BLANDINET: Before they come the inventory has to be taken.

DANIEL: Do you want to take it to-night?

BLANDINET: Well, no, monsieur, I'd rather not to-night—if you don't mind.

DANIEL: Very well. Go off and have a pleasant evening with your beetles and your butterflies.

BLANDINET: It isn't that, sir, but I had a rather poor night last night.

DANIEL: Oh, you too?

BLANDINET: Yes, sir—a ridiculous accident. I know it sounds silly, sir, but I understand it happens quite often. I was stuck all night in the Big Wheel at Luna Park. (*Speaking as he moves to exit.*)

DANIEL: What?

BLANDINET (*as he exits R.*): Yes, monsieur.

DANIEL (*as curtain slowly descends*): Well, I'll be . . . (*To audience*) Don't listen, ladies!

[Curtain.]

ACT II

THE SAME. FRIDAY AFTERNOON.

A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER.

As curtain rises Daniel is examining a small terra-cotta bust of Voltaire. Blandinet stands beside him up C. at window.

DANIEL: Yes, it's very nice but not worth much by itself.

BLANDINET: By itself?

DANIEL: It's one of a pair, Voltaire and Rousseau. The originals, in bronze, are in the collection of the Baron de Rothschild, but Houdon made several terra-cotta casts of which this is one.

BLANDINET: I believe they have got the Rousseau, but it's a patchwork of broken pieces. The fellow says his grandmother smashed it during a row with her husband.

DANIEL: Grandmama threw it at grandpa? It's awful to think how long that sort of thing can go on—couples snapping and scolding in their wheel-chairs.

BLANDINET: Yes, monsieur—May I ask something, monsieur? When is Madame coming home? (*He indicates photograph on table beside him.*)

DANIEL: I'm not quite—(*Breaks off and adds:*) Why do you want to know?

BLANDINET: Someone was enquiring this morning.

DANIEL: A man?

BLANDINET: Yes, monsieur—The man with the flowers.

DANIEL (*rising abruptly*): Oh, he brings flowers?

BLANDINET: I mean the old man from St Cloud with the flowers, that madame uses in the house.

DANIEL: Ah-h-h! *That* man . . . Well, you can tell him I don't know just when madame will be back! Her—her brother is ill.

BLANDINET: I'm sorry. Is it serious?

DANIEL: Jaundice—yellow as a buttercup, poor fellow.

[*Baron enters through arch and peers at chaise-longue as if he expected to see Madeleine. He looks round the room, and, doing so, catches Daniel's eye, smiles and slightly inclines his head, then, adjusting his monocle, he crosses to the escritoire.*]

DANIEL: It must be getting to be quite an old friend.

[*He says this sitting at his desk without turning his head to the Baron, who is behind his back.*]

BARON: I beg pardon?

DANIEL: The escritoire. (*He turns in his chair*) My assistant tells me you pay it daily visits.

BARON: The thing is strangely attractive. I can't say "no" to it, but, on the other hand, I can't say "yes".

BLANDINET: What about this bust, monsieur? Shall I give him eight? He said he'd accept your valuation.

DANIEL: Then give him nine. (*Takes money out of drawer.*)

BARON (*who is still inspecting the escritoire*): None of the drawers lock.

DANIEL: No, I am well aware of that. (*Hands money to Blandinet.*)

BLANDINET: He said he'd been told you were the most honest man in the antique business.

DANIEL: Not a very high compliment but it's going to get him an extra thousand.

[*Blandinet takes the extra thousand handed him and goes out.*]

DANIEL: I thought it might be some other *objet d'art* that had caught your fancy.

BARON: I see what you are thinking— Tell me, is your daughter away?

DANIEL: My daughter?

BARON: Oh, pardon; wasn't the young lady—? (*He makes a gesture toward the chaise-longue as he crosses Daniel going to it.*)

DANIEL: The lady was my wife.

BARON (*turning*): Your wife. Let me congratulate you . . . So, you too have learned the secret?

DANIEL: Secret?

BARON: That the fountain of youth is youth itself. A young wife can take twenty years off a man's age. (*Sits on chaise longue.*)

DANIEL: At times. And at others add twenty to it. (*As he speaks he gets up from chair, helping himself up with chair arms.*)

BARON (*closing his eyes as if pained by the sight*): My dear sir, don't do that. Don't ever do that.

DANIEL: Do what?

BARON: Push yourself up out of a chair in that middle-aged manner. You should rise like this (*He rises without using his arms to help him up.*)

DANIEL: I see.

BARON (*sits once again*): Tell me, monsieur, are you a leg lifter?

DANIEL: I beg your pardon?

[*He lifts one leg over the other, using his hand.*]

DANIEL: I haven't quite reached that stage, but I'll watch it.

BARON (*rising*): I could supply you with a list of "don'ts".

DANIEL: It's very kind of you.

BARON: As for instance—don't shuffle; walk with a springy step. (*He illustrates*) Don't rub your knee after kneeling or pat your chest after running—Do you make a noise when you're eating soup?

DANIEL: I don't think so.

BARON: You should be very sure. How about snoring?

DANIEL: There have been complaints—but not too often.

BARON: The answer is two pillows—or in extreme cases three.

DANIEL (*nodding, as if making a mental note*): Two pillows.

BARON: Never look over the tops of your glasses—if you wear glasses. Don't reminisce . . . Don't—

DANIEL (*interrupting*): You're quite an authority . . . But tell me, have you any special advice as to—love?

BARON: I'm afraid not. I haven't lived long enough. Perhaps in another fifteen or twenty years—

DANIEL: Won't that be a little late?

BARON: Too late for practice but perhaps not for precept. But I must be getting along. I'll think the *escritoire* over for a couple of days longer—if I may?

DANIEL: I should have supposed you would banish the antique—even from your furnishings.

BARON: Not at all. My contention is that the antique—(*He touches his breast with his finger tips and makes a slight bow*) is just as serviceable as the modern and has—shall we say?—a patina, a certain old world charm.

DANIEL: I'm not sure the ladies don't prefer the shiny new chromium-plated article—straight from the factory.

BARON: Ah, my dear sir, it's all a question of salesmanship.

[*He turns and goes off through shop.*]

(*Off*) Good afternoon, madame.

[*Julie enters, peering in.*]

JULIE: Am I interfering with business?

DANIEL: Not at all. Come in.

JULIE (*looking round*): Where is she?

[*Daniel points to Lautrec on chair down right.*]

I had to come. I missed her. It's like having a daughter get married. You fight against paying a visit too soon but then you feel you *must* see her. (*She turns looking at picture on chair down right.*)

DANIEL: Have a little patience. I'll be getting a good price for her very soon. (*Moving R. to Julie.*)

JULIE: No hurry. I rather enjoy being a property owner.

DANIEL: The boys that know a lot will pay a *good* price, but the boys that don't know *quite* so much will pay still more.

JULIE (*sitting on chaise*): How's your love-life, Jo-jo?

DANIEL: I'm envying the oyster. (*Moving up L.*)

JULIE: Oyster?

DANIEL (*crossing to desk*): The perfect union, pre-ordained, indestructible—no distrusts, no jealousy, no clash of temperaments. Just you and yourself, wife in the summer, husband when the month has an R. in it.

JULIE: Is that true?

DANIEL: Certainly it's true. Blandinet told me, he's an authority.

JULIE: And the oyster makes pearls.

DANIEL (*sitting on desk*): To present to itself. Could anything be more charming? The only present that was ever given to celebrate a perfect marriage.

JULIE: It sounds damn dull to me . . . Sex is like life: what fun is it unless there's a fight in it?

DANIEL (*rises*): I'm tired of perpetual emotion. (*Crosses L. of desk chair.*)

JULIE: I know. A woman drives you crazy, gets in your hair—but it's good for you.

DANIEL: Oh, really? You don't say!

JULIE: And it keeps *her* interested.

DANIEL: I don't doubt . . . Love through irritation is one of the most highly-prized forms of feminine sadism.

JULIE: Where is this girl of yours?

DANIEL: I don't know. (*Crossing above desk he comes down R. of it.*)

JULIE: You don't know?

DANIEL: Not for five days—more important—not for five *nights*. (*Sitting on stool facing audience.*)

JULIE: You've spent them alone?

DANIEL: My imagination has been sitting up with me.

JULIE: So you wouldn't take my advice and let bygones be has-beens?

DANIEL: I'd no choice in the matter—*she* left *me*.

JULIE: That love-letter of yours—was *that* it? Must have been a pretty hot one.

DANIEL: No, *that* was all right. Valentine straightened her out about that.

JULIE: Very obliging of her. More than most ex-wives would do.

DANIEL: It didn't seem to do much good. It was right after they'd had their talk that Madeleine told me she was leaving.

JULIE: "They had their talk?" You don't mean to tell me you left the two of them alone?

DANIEL: Certainly—why not?

JULIE: For a clever man you're an awful fool, Jo-jo.

DANIEL (*turns, faces Julie*): Valentine said just what I asked her to say. Madeleine told me.

JULIE: All right, old boy, they're *your* wives. You should know them.

DANIEL (*with a shrug*): *Know* them! A fine chance! Women are as much a mystery to me now as they were the day one of them bent over my crib and said "goo-goo" to me.

JULIE: Poor Jo-jo!

DANIEL: It's like a chap I knew that was planning to go to Russia. He said by the time you've mastered the language you've lost your interest in the country.

JULIE: Oh—speaking of travellers, I see that our old friend Michel Aubrion is back in Paris.

DANIEL: Yes, there was a picture of him in *Paris Soir*, sitting in a huge suite in the Georges Cinq.

JULIE: Seems he's become a big shot somewhere over in America.

DANIEL: Yes. In Bogota.

JULIE: Bogota. We had a nickname for him. I don't remember—

DANIEL: Jigs—short for Jigsaw—

JULIE: That's right—Jigsaw! (*Suddenly it comes to her*) Jigsaw—because whenever a pretty girl appeared he'd go all to pieces . . . Well, he's made his mark in the world—

DANIEL (*only half listening*): Yes.

JULIE: Funny, that—not too bright, was he?

DANIEL: Maybe he seems brighter in Bogota.

JULIE: Kind of chap that when you'd meet him and say "How are you?" he'd *tell* you.

[*The distant ring of private doorbell in kitchen.*]

DANIEL: Thing I remember about him is those awful jokes he used to tell.

JULIE: And then laugh at them himself.

[*Henriette, coming from the living quarters, opens door. This action overlaps last line.*]

PORTER (*at exterior door off L.*): Monsieur Bachelet.

HENRIETTE: Monsieur Bachelet? That's right.

[*A Porter enters, carrying a largish trunk. He stands near arch L. Henriette who has entered with him is on his right, nearer centre.*]

DANIEL: Hello; what's that? (*Turns L.*)

PORTER: I will not deceive you, sir. It's a trunk.

DANIEL: So I see, but where is it from?

PORTER: A lady sent it. She said she'd probably be here herself to receive it.

DANIEL: Oh, she did, did she?

PORTER: And if not, she said her *husband* would pay me for it. (*He puts trunk down on top step.*)

JULIE: She's come back to you—

DANIEL: She might have come round first and found out whether or not she was welcome.

PORTER (*mopping his brow*): Quite a load, sir. Heavy enough to have a body in it.

HENRIETTE (*a little cry*) Oh! (*She steps quickly back from trunk, regarding it with fear.*)

PORTER: You never can tell nowadays, can you? When I was a kid, they were mostly made of wicker. They'd *drip*. But these modern things close up so tight never a drop'd come out.

HENRIETTE: Where do you want it put, sir?

DANIEL (*moving above desk. Half to himself, half to Julie*): I don't know that I want it anywhere.

JULIE: Don't be a fool, Jo-jo.

DANIEL: All right, take it through there—the maid will show you. (*He points*) You can leave it in the hall for the present, Henriette.

HENRIETTE: Yes, monsieur—

[*She exits L.*]

PORTER (*as he again picks up trunk*): Henriette, eh? My favourite name!

[*He follows Henriette off with trunk.*]

DANIEL: Wonder if I shouldn't have it sent straight back?

JULIE (*rises*): Nonsense! Don't forget—the cosy little dinners; the pocketful of daily doings you turn out each evening—life's pretty lonely without those things, old boy.

DANIEL (*nodding*): H'm!

JULIE: You come to realise it—when you're like me. For *me* to be in love wouldn't even be tragedy—just something to make a cat laugh.

DANIEL: You're well out of it.

JULIE: Ever stop to think the way you men have all the best of it?

DANIEL: I'd say we had all the *worst* of it.

JULIE: Well, you're wrong. What does age do to you? Puts more character in your faces—makes you more attractive. . . . And romance—you have fifty years of it, women thirty—if they're lucky.

DANIEL: Nonsense. Women can go on for ever. Nothing to stop them.

JULIE: No? You can't play tennis if no one wants to play it *with* you . . . But I must be running along. (*She goes to the Lautrec and stands looking at it*) Five hundred thousand francs, you said?

DANIEL: Or more. (*Comes down L. of desk.*)

JULIE (*staring at picture*): It seems like yesterday that I used to go there and pose for him. Standing around in that big draughty studio of his, as naked as a peeled banana. He put the clothes on it afterwards—said he has to do it that way to get the anatomy right . . . Sounded silly to me then, undressing a woman in a picture and then dressing her up again—just as you might your sweetheart.

DANIEL: We know that's the way Goya did it.

JULIE: Goya? He was a bit before my time, I fancy.

DANIEL: Yes, indeed.

JULIE: Well, thank God *somebody* was.

[*She goes to arch R., gives a little wave of the hand, and exits.*]

HENRIETTE (*off L.*): Get out, you rat! Go on.

PORTER (*off L.*): All right. All right. Keep your hair on.

[*Almost at the same time the Porter reappears.*]

DANIEL: What's the matter?

PORTER (*looking after her*): These women, eh?

DANIEL: How right you are!

PORTER: Nothing to be done about it, of course?

DANIEL: Nothing.

PORTER (*moves R. to Daniel standing L. of chaise*):

If I were to tell you the story of my life, sir—

DANIEL: You've had your experiences, eh?

PORTER: Are you by any chance a literatoor, sir?

DANIEL: I beg your pardon?

PORTER: By which I mean, do you write novels?

DANIEL: I'm afraid I don't.

PORTER: Pity—my life'd make a novel.

DANIEL: Would it really?

PORTER: I'll give it to you in a couple of words.

Meet a girl, pretty girl— (*Illustrating with hands*) beautiful profile, beautiful profile right down to her toes.

DANIEL: So you get married?

PORTER: Right, first guess . . . I see *you know* something about life, sir!

DANIEL: Oh yes, I've had my experiences too.

PORTER: Well, six months later, she meets another man. But doesn't tell me, see? Makes excuses, see? Says she was taken sick; had to spend the night at her sister's house—*that* was one of 'em.

DANIEL: You believed her?

PORTER: Yes, why not? Thought she'd stick to me like a silk shirt on a hot day . . . Y'see all the time it was happening she went right on pulling my ears and calling me bébé.

DANIEL: And you were treating her kindly?

PORTER: That was the trouble. You treat 'em rough and they love you. You love 'em and they treat you rough.

DANIEL (*thoughtfully*): Maybe you're right.

PORTER: Then one day I come home and she's gone—left me flatter than a duck's instep.

DANIEL: Did you go after her?

PORTER: Not me, sir! I've learned something, and I'll pass it along to you.

DANIEL: I wish you would.

PORTER (*as if it were a profound discovery*): All cats are grey in the dark.

DANIEL (*he rises and crosses to L. of desk*): I've heard the saying— (*Taking notes from drawer*) But tell me, what do I owe you?

PORTER: Two hundred francs:

DANIEL: Only two hundred francs all the way from Rue Cassot? (*Taking out money.*)

PORTER: Not Rue Cassot, sir . . . just up the Faubourg . . . 10 Rue d'Antin.

DANIEL: My God! (*Moving below desk.*)

PORTER: Something wrong?

DANIEL: What was the lady like—glasses? Flat-heeled shoes? Badly dressed?

PORTER: No, sir, nothing like that. No glasses, swell clothes . . . and shoes . . . (*Holds fingers, indicating size*) She had heels, as high as that!

DANIEL: H'm, strange—

PORTER: Isn't the lady your wife, sir? (*Below desk. On Daniel's R.*)

DANIEL: Yes.

PORTER: But you thought she'd be coming from the Rue Cassot?

DANIEL: There's another wife—another lady I mean, who lives in Rue d'Antin.

PORTER: My Uncle Baptiste used to say, "Having no woman is a damn sight better than having two."

DANIEL (*puzzling it out*): It doesn't sound like— (*Breaks off.*)

PORTER: No, sir.

DANIEL: The description is much more like— (*Again he breaks off.*)

PORTER: Yes, sir.

DANIEL: It beats me. (*Moving slightly L.*)

PORTER: Wait a minute—does the wife with the pretty feet know the wife that lives in the Rue d'Antin?

DANIEL: God! I wonder? Yes, she does, but—

PORTER (*pleased with himself*): We men could be a lot of help to each other if we'd talk things over together—like they do. Now the next point is—
(*He starts to tick it off on his fingers.*)

DANIEL: *Please!* Don't you bother your head about it. You stay in your novel, and I'll stay in mine.
(*Moving to L. of desk.*)

PORTER: Very good, sir. (*Crosses to door, turns*) Would you want to have my name, sir? As a matter of business? (*Moving up R. a pace.*)

DANIEL: Yes—go on out through the shop and give it to my assistant, will you? (*Giving Porter money*) And there's a little extra for your philosophy.

PORTER (*crossing R., he turns*): Thank you, sir . . . And just one thing from my experience that you might find useful—

DANIEL: Yes?

PORTER (*very confidentially*): Never have yourself tattooed with any woman's name—not even her initials.

DANIEL: I'll try to remember. (*Above desk.*)

PORTER: Yes, monsieur.

[*Porter exits.*]

(*Looks after him, shakes his head sympathetically*)
Poor fellow!

[*As he speaks, Henriette appears in hall L. She opens the door, admitting Valentine. But a completely different Valentine, beautifully groomed, every hair in place—a stunning creature—the last word.*]

VALENTINE: Hello, Henriette! Is Monsieur in?

HENRIETTE: Yes, madam.

VALENTINE (*sees him*): Ah yes, there he is! Hello, Daniel!

[*He turns swiftly and finds her standing near him.*]

DANIEL: Well, of all the—

VALENTINE: I heard the news only yesterday. (*Crossing Daniel, she puts her bag on table up C.*)

DANIEL: What news?

VALENTINE: Madeleine has left you. You're getting a divorce.

DANIEL: I can't get over the change in you. You look stunning. Your costume is the perfection of good taste. I'd quite forgotten what a flair you have for clothes.

VALENTINE: I'm glad you approve! It's all for you. (*She turns round, exhibiting herself.*)

DANIEL: For *me*?

VALENTINE: Has my trunk arrived? (*Moving L.*)

DANIEL: You don't mean to say that trunk is yours?

VALENTINE (*handing him her parasol*): I 'phoned Henriette to look out for it and unpack it immediately. I don't want my frocks to get crushed.

DANIEL: Wait a *minute*—

VALENTINE: You wanted me to look smart— (*She does a mannequin walk up and down.*)

DANIEL: I told you I wanted you to look smart so that you could find yourself a husband.

VALENTINE: What husband do you think I could find, after you? (*She lets her hand rest on his arm with a gesture of affection.*)

DANIEL: You seemed to think you were going to find quite a good one when you left my bed and board.

VALENTINE: I made *my* mistake, and *you* made *yours*. We both see it now. As far as I'm concerned, it's as if it never happened.

DANIEL: That's very nice of you, but— (*Moving down R. a pace.*)

VALENTINE (*taking Daniel's L. arm—they move down R. together*) (*Overlapping*): You know, the thing that's been troubling me all this time is the idea that I've not been pulling my weight in the boat.

DANIEL: What boat?

VALENTINE: *This* boat, this business— (*She waves her hand, indicating the room*) I don't like the feeling of being a non-working partner. I can be damned useful to you. (*She moves up C. to above the desk.*)

DANIEL: Yes; I daresay that's true—

VALENTINE: Of course—if you don't want me here, you've only to say so. Just the merest hint—you know how sensitive I am . . . (*Reciting*)

“But the sensitive plant which can give small fruit

Of the love which it feels from the leaf to the root—”

DANIEL (*breaking in*): Excuse me! Can't we talk in prose?

VALENTINE: If you prefer . . . Where did *this* come from? (*She picks up the Voltaire from up stage end of desk.*)

DANIEL: I just bought it.

VALENTINE: I know where there's a Rousseau to match it.

DANIEL: You do? (*Putting parasol down on chaise.*)

VALENTINE: Yes, and I know of a wealthy collector who is looking for the pair— (*Inspecting bust closely*) This is a very good cast, and not a chip off it. They ought to fetch sixty thousand, maybe sixty-five.

DANIEL: I could use the money—my share of it.

VALENTINE: Yes; that last wife of yours was an extravagant hussy—so I'm told. (*Moving down L., she sits on chair in front of the escritoire.*)

DANIEL: I encouraged her to buy pretty clothes—I liked to see her in them.

VALENTINE: And you encouraged *me* to do the same when I was here the other day.

DANIEL: Yes, but for quite a different— (*He crosses to L. above Valentine*) (*Breaks off*) Look, Valentine, you can't come barging in here bringing your trunk with you. You'll get yourself talked about—

VALENTINE (*with a laugh*): Talked about for being under the same roof as my own husband?

DANIEL: I'm *not* your husband. I'm Madeleine's. (*Facing her.*)

VALENTINE: Not any more. She's busy finding herself a new one.

DANIEL: How do you know? (*He bends over her.*)

VALENTINE: I ran into her yesterday as she was going into the Georges Cinq—we had a chat.

DANIEL: The Georges Cinq?

VALENTINE: She was meeting a man there.

DANIEL: Did she say so?

VALENTINE: No; but you can always tell when a woman's going to meet a man—she's got an air about her, a mingling of the romantic and the businesslike.

DANIEL: Look, Valentine, what did you say to Madeleine the other day?

VALENTINE (*rising and moving R. above desk*): Just what you *told* me to say—that that love-letter was written in my time.

DANIEL (*turns—facing up stage*): I *know* you said more than that—so don't pretend.

VALENTINE: Oh, I suppose Madeleine told you that I said you weren't to be trusted?

DANIEL: You said that? (*Crossing below desk.*)

VALENTINE: What did you *expect*? You asked me to assume the role of a deceived wife, didn't you? (*Crossing R., she sits on chaise.*)

DANIEL: There was no need to blacken my character.

VALENTINE: You're accusing me of making trouble?

DANIEL: Because I'm quite certain you did. That's

what I get for expecting a woman to behave like a gentleman.

VALENTINE: Well, that's a fine thing, after the way I lied to cover up your amour.

DANIEL (*slowly*): You *didn't* lie. That's one little sin you won't need to confess. (*Moving up L. of desk.*)

VALENTINE: You mean that that letter really *was* written in my time?

DANIEL: Yes.

VALENTINE (*rises and moves up to R. of Daniel*): And on top of that, you have the impudence to get me to assure your second wlfе that you *didn't* cheat on her!

DANIEL: Well now at least your conscience will feel a little easier about the way you walked out on me.

VALENTINE: How long did this affair go on? (*Facing him.*)

DANIEL: Really, Valentine—this is like a post-mortem after the rubber is over. I've confessed, isn't that—

VALENTINE (*breaking in*): "Confessed!" That's a word that only applies to woman. When you men talk about your pasts it's bragging . . . you and your Leda, you—you—disgusting beast!

[*She snatches up the Voltaire bust and is about to throw it but he catches her arm.*]

DANIEL: Stop! We're not married any more. Throwing things is a wife's privilege.

VALENTINE: Let go of me.

DANIEL (*taking bust from her*): Anyway, not Voltaire—the man who called woman "God's beautiful afterthought". (*Putting bust on desk.*)

VALENTINE: To think that you dared to treat me like that, you disgusting *swan*! (*Leans against desk chair.*)

DANIEL (*moving to L. of her he faces her*): I was ashamed at the time. If I went to the Louvre, I

avoided the room with Titian's Leda . . . I hated to see Lohengrin . . . I even got a twinge of conscience if I sat on a down cushion.

VALENTINE: Well now, let me tell *you* something, my fine feathered friend. I had one or two love-letters in *your* time, too.

DANIEL: What? There were *men*! (*He starts to act, running his hand through his hair.*)

VALENTINE: They weren't written by chimpanzees. (*Crossing up R. of C.*)

DANIEL (*catching her by wrist—acting*): That settles it—get out of my house! Go! (*Throwing her round to L.*)

VALENTINE (*cowering*): Daniel! (*She backs to arch L. to living quarters.*)

[*Blandinet enters.*]

DANIEL: Get out before I lay hands on you!

VALENTINE: Oh, Daniel, now I know you love me! Isn't that beautiful!

[*She suddenly throws her arms around his neck and kisses him, then turns and exits quickly as Blandinet comes forward.*]

DANIEL (*turning to Blandinet*): Well, it seems as if I'd overdone that a bit.

BLANDINET: Yes, monsieur. (*Nodding his head.*)

DANIEL: The female animal is never so dangerous as when you think it's running away from you.

BLANDINET (*crossing above desk*): There was a phone call, Monsieur. The Baron de Charançay. He says he's decided to buy the *escritoire*.

DANIEL: Good—I shall be glad to see the last of the damned thing—

BLANDINET (*looking at it*): It's a very pretty piece, Monsieur.

DANIEL: One gets very sick of pretty pieces. (*Taking parasol and bag*) (*Crosses to hall*) By the way, do you

know how to get hold of that porter who was here just now?

BLANDINET: Yes, Monsieur.

DANIEL: Send for him, will you? I want him to come and collect a trunk.

[*He exits up the stairs.*]

[*Blandinet pulls out the drawer of *escritoire* L. and peers into it cautiously, as if looking for insects. There is the sound of voices coming from the shop. Blandinet turns to go back to it but, as he does so, he comes face to face with Madeleine, accompanied by Michel Aubrion. Michel is a good-looking man of the same age as Daniel. Madeleine is dazzlingly attired, and wears a small spray of orchids.*]

MICHEL (*speaking off*): I think we've struck lucky this time.

[*They enter R. arm in arm.*]

MADELEINE: Yes. This looks like part of the shop! (*Before Blandinet can speak*) Good afternoon—is the proprietor in?

BLANDINET (*up L. Blinking*): The proprietor?

MADELEINE: Your employer—the antiquary. Is he here?

BLANDINET (*still staring at her in round-eyed astonishment*): Yes, madame—I—I think so.

MADELEINE: Well, tell him two customers would like to see him.

MICHEL (*examining oak panelling R.*): I say, look at this panelling. We could use it very nicely! (*Moving into archway and examining settee.*)

BLANDINET: "Two customers?" . . . Very good, madame.

MADELEINE (*crossing to Blandinet, in confidential tone*): No names, mind. Just "two customers". It's a surprise.

BLANDINET: I see.

[*Michel is in archway R., inspecting some of the furniture with a monocle which he holds in one hand.*]

MICHEL (*calling*): This fellow has some nice things here.

MADELEINE (*calling back*): Yes, hasn't he?

BLANDINET (*G., in low voice*): I told him about the Big Wheel.

MADELEINE: Thank you. That was very good of you.

[*Blandinet moves to arch L.*]

MICHEL (*calling*): Come here, darling.

[*Blandinet turns.*]

Come and look at this couch.

MADELEINE (*moving R. to Michel*): What is it, dear?

MICHEL: This settee is a gem.

MADELEINE: Yes, charming!

MICHEL: We *must* have it. In fact, I see several "musts". This is one of the best antique shops in Paris. (*Coming G. and examining various objets d'art.*)

MADELEINE: So *I* thought. I happened to be passing this morning and I was quite struck with it. (*She moves G. a pace.*)

[*Blandinet is arrested by this speech just as he is about to go into hallway of living quarters. He swings round staring at them. Madeleine turns her head, and, meeting his gaze, treats him to a dazzling smile.*]

[*He goes out L.*]

Of course we need be in no hurry to start buying things. We've got plenty of time. (*Sitting on chaise longue.*)

MICHEL (*moving to L. of Madeleine*): Sorry, my sweet, you're talking to the do-it-now boy. Never waste time once I've seen something I want. You must realise that. Look how I was with you.

MADELEINE: I still think that was rather absurd, proposing to a girl after only knowing her for two days.

MICHEL: Ah, but it doesn't take very long to fall in love with you.

MADELEINE: Pretty speech!

[She holds out a hand to him. He takes it and kisses it. As he does so, he suddenly sees the Lautrec down R.]

MICHEL: My God! •

MADELEINE: What's the matter?

MICHEL: That picture! •

MADELEINE: A Toulouse-Lautrec, obviously.

MICHEL: Yes, but the subject, the girl—I used to know her.

MADELEINE: Really?

MICHEL: Julie Bille-en-Bois. She was a dancer. *(He moves down R. to examine the picture.)*

[As he continues to stare at the picture the door opens and Daniel enters, followed by Blandinet. Blandinet doesn't look at anyone but, with rather set gaze, crosses to shop entrance and disappears. Madeleine lays a finger on her lips, telling Daniel not to speak, and motions towards Michel's back, as if asking Daniel's opinion of him.]

[Meantime Michel has taken picture from chair R. He stands with his back to the others examining the painting down R. corner.]

MICHEL: This is wonderful! What a find!

MADELEINE: Good afternoon, monsieur. This gentleman and I were just looking round.

DANIEL (stonily): What is it you want?

[Michel recognises Daniel's voice, puts picture back on to the chair.]

MADELEINE: Your opinion—if you will be so kind—on some—articles I am interested in.

[*Michel turns as she speaks, sees Daniel, and is amazed.*]

MICHEL: Daniel! (*Crossing excitedly to L., he kisses Daniel on both cheeks.*)

DANIEL (*also surprised*): Why, Michel!

MICHEL: Well, I'll be damned!

DANIEL: This is certainly a surprise! You and—this lady—

MICHEL: Oh, pardon me! (*Crossing to C., so that Madeleine is on his R. Daniel on his L.*) This shock is making me forget my manners! This is my fiancée. (*Taking Daniel by R. arm.*)

DANIEL (*faintly*): Fiancée?

MICHEL: Yes, Madeleine de Firmont . . . Madeleine, this chap turns out to be one of my oldest friends, Daniel Bachelet. (*His arm round Daniel's shoulder.*)

DANIEL: De Firmont, you said?

MADELEINE: That's right, it was my maiden name. I've gone back to it since I separated from my husband.

MICHEL: There's no need for you to bother with surnames. You two must be Madeleine and Daniel to each other.

[*Daniel breaks L. to chair by desk.*]

MADELEINE: Monsieur Bachelet may not have your New World informality.

MICHEL: *Daniel?* He'd get on friendly terms with a pretty girl quicker than any chap I ever knew. (*R. of Daniel.*)

MADELEINE: Really?

MICHEL: Half an hour alone with him, and she was a woman with a past. (*He laughs gaily*) How about it, old boy? Are you still dusting 'em off your doorstep every morning?

MADELEINE: Perhaps Monsieur Bachelet didn't succeed in fighting off matrimony as long as you have.

MICHEL: Of course—I was quite forgetting. How is your beloved Valentine? Well, I hope? (*Turns to Madeleine*) I knew his wife—pretty as a picture. (*Back to Daniel*) No wonder you were so crazy about her.

MADELEINE: It's refreshing today to hear of a man who is devoted to his own wife—instead of someone else's.

MICHEL: You never saw anything like it. Every morning, winter or summer on her breakfast tray there would be a single red rose. And she would wear it all day pinned over her heart. (*He indicates where.*)

MADELEINE: Charming! No, you're right—I never did hear anything like it—but I'm afraid you're embarrassing monsieur. I really believe he's blushing.

DANIEL: Nonsense—I'm used to your fiancé's exuberant exaggerations.

MICHEL: No exaggeration about it. (*To Madeleine*) They were a regular pair of turtle-doves.

MADELEINE (*moving down R.*): Turtle-doves? I understand the best example of a faithful husband in the bird world is the swan. (*She sits on chaise.*)

MICHEL: Swan, swan? That seems to strike a chord somewhere— (*He taps his brow trying to remember.*)

MADELEINE: Something connected with Monsieur Bachelet?

MICHEL (*urging him*): Daniel! Call him Daniel! (*Sitting beside Madeleine.*)

MADELEINE: Very well. Now I should like to hear what Daniel thinks of you.

DANIEL: I would say that Michel would be able to fill your requirements for a husband perfectly. (*L. of desk chair.*)

MICHEL: There!

MADELEINE: I hope you're not merely referring to his wealth and my—possibly—extravagant tastes?

MICHEL: As to that, I think my earning capacity can keep up with your yearning capacity! (*He laughs again.*)

DANIEL: Ha! Ha! Ha! I don't think I'm a very good one to consult on this subject . . . I'm inclined to be cynical . . . so few marriages turn out happily.

MICHEL: You needn't tell that to Madeleine. She is just escaping from an unhappy one herself.

DANIEL (*with irony*): Pardon, madame, I'm sorry if I've awakened painful memories.

MADELEINE: *Most* of the memories of my marriage are very pleasant.

MICHEL: *Really?* I'd rather imagined the old boy was a complete louse.

MADELEINE: Far from it! And "old boy" is not at all a good description of him.

MICHEL: Oh, come now—you certainly told me he was old enough to be your father.

MADELEINE: What a charming father! So gay! So young for his age!

MICHEL (*rises and crosses to Michel*): Damn nice of her to speak well of the fellow, isn't it? Shows she's got a warm, generous nature.

MADELEINE: I was at least generous enough to give him back his freedom.

MICHEL: What a mug he was to let her go, eh? (*Eyeing her admiringly*) Where does the poor fish think he's going to find anything like that again?

MADELEINE: At any rate, now he's got his run of the farmyard.

DANIEL: While you start in with a new set of marriage vows—which I hope, for both your sakes, you will *both* of you keep.

MICHEL: Ha, ha, ha! That's funny coming from *you*. (*Sits on L. of desk.*)

[*Madeleine laughs.*]

DANIEL (*resentfully*): What's funny about it?

MICHEL: For myself, I've had enough of love *a la carte*. I'm quite ready to settle down to the *table d'hôte*.

MADELEINE (*to Daniel*): Do you think he will remain true, monsieur? You know him better than I do.

DANIEL: Well, I'm not so sure about that. (*Stands next to Michel.*)

MADELEINE (*displaying herself for inspection*): Would you fancy I am the sort of woman who can hold a man? As far as you can judge from a first impression.

DANIEL: My *first* impression would be that you yourself had a faithful nature.

MICHEL: Of course she has. There's a girl you can trust if ever I met one—and I've got an instinct about these things. Never been wrong yet.

DANIEL: I congratulate you. (*Tapping Michel on shoulder, moves above desk to C.*)

MADELEINE: I don't know why you have such faith in me, Michel. I'm really just a pick-up—a girl you met in the lobby of the Georges Cinq.

DANIEL: Oh, is *that* how it all happened? (*Coming between them R. of C.*)

MICHEL: She'd caught the heel of her shoe and broke it off. Those silly four-inch heels— (*Illustrates, as did the Porter*) You know how helpless a girl is with one off and one on.

DANIEL: Yes, I've seen them in that state.

MICHEL: I'll bet you have! You've seen them in *every* state.

DANIEL: And what happened after the heels were restored to their normal state of support?

MICHEL: Oh, I just chased her until she caught me. (*Laughs*) But to change the subject, old boy, there's something *I'm* dying to ask you . . . This picture here— (*He turns to the Lautrec*) Surely that's Julie, isn't it? Julie Bille-en-Bois?

DANIEL: Yes, that's Julie—as she *was*. (*Crossing to L. of desk and writes on pad.*)

MICHEL: Well, well, well—Some men decorate their homes with old masters and others with old mistresses. (*Laughs.*)

DANIEL (*stiffly*): I beg your pardon. (*Looking up.*)

MADELEINE (*interested*): Really? (*She comes and inspects the picture closely*) Interesting.

MICHEL: What about Julie as she *is*? If she still is—

DANIEL: Oh yes, very much *is*.

MICHEL: It's a genuine Lautrec?

DANIEL: As genuine as Julie herself. Also it's signed.

MICHEL: I'm not an expert like you are, but I've something of a flair—I've picked up a few choice things here and there—

DANIEL (*looking at Madeleine*): In the lobby of the Georges Cinq, for instance. (*Moving up C.*)

MICHEL: Ha! Good— (*To Madeleine*) He's got a great sense of humour, you'll find out. But let's not get off the subject. Is the picture for sale? (*He rises, moves above desk C., meeting Daniel.*)

DANIEL: Yes.

MICHEL: Expensive?

DANIEL: Very. And it's practically sold.

MICHEL: Oh, don't tell me that! How much?

DANIEL: Six hundred thousand francs.

MICHEL: I don't call that dear for a masterpiece. (*To Madeleine*) What do you think? (*Moving down to Madeleine.*)

MADELEINE: I think it's absolutely lovely!

[*Michel catches her hand and raises it to his lips gallantly.*]

MICHEL: Well, faint purse never won fair lady. (*To Daniel*) Look, I'll give you six hundred and fifty thousand for it right away. How about it?

DANIEL: H'm, I don't know. I'm afraid—

MICHEL: Seven hundred thousand, if you like.

DANIEL: Very well. I accept. I'll tell the New York people they didn't act quickly enough.

MICHEL: Good. It's a deal. I've got a cheque book in my pocket. (*Takes it out and sits on stool.*)

DANIEL: By the way, the picture's not mine. The cheque must be made out to the owner.

MICHEL: Who's that?

DANIEL (*slowly*): Julie.

MICHEL: You don't get *any* of this?

DANIEL: Not a sou. (*Crossing to R. of chaise below desk.*)

MICHEL: What on earth will *Julie* do with seven hundred thousand francs?

DANIEL: Live on it for the rest of her life. *Not*, however at the Georges Cinq. (*Moving down to R. corner.*)

MICHEL (*laughs*): Ah! good! But you can *speak* for her?

DANIEL: Oh, yes; I've *spoken* for her. If you will make out the cheque to her, I'll see that the papers are properly executed.

MICHEL: Good! (*Starts to write cheque on desk.*)

MADELEINE (*as Michel writes cheque*): You're a good friend, aren't you?

DANIEL: I think that would be a pleasant line to find written on one's tombstone.

MADELEINE: I would like to have you for a friend.

DANIEL: A real friendship between a man and a woman is very rare.

MADELEINE: Is it so little?

DANIEL: A woman said a strange thing to me once. She said: "It is easier to be the enemy of your lover than his friend."

MADELEINE: Yes; it is so throughout nature, in other species. The bees—and spiders—

DANIEL: Oh, you know about the spiders, do you? Who told you?

MICHEL (*who has been through with both cheque and*

stub for a couple of lines): Bees! Spiders! What on earth are you two talking about? (*He leaves cheque book on desk.*)

MADELEINE (*rises, crosses to Michel*): You're a great man, Michel. In one minute you can write a cheque that will take care of some penniless person for the rest of their days— (*She slips an arm about him and kisses him on the cheek.*)

MICHEL (*rises, takes his hat from table R.*): We must be going. There's the cheque. You told me you had an engagement with your lawyer to talk about your divorce.

MADELEINE (*to Daniel*): Another pleasant feature of Michel's wealth is that I don't have to ask my *first* husband for a sou.

DANIEL (*crossing to L. in front of desk*) (*Violently*): To hell with that!

[*There is a moment's surprised silence.*]

MICHEL: What on earth do you mean by that, Daniel?

DANIEL: I should think it's what any man would say. I dislike all this talk about money in love-affairs, whether just breaking up or just starting—

MICHEL: I see. (*Turning to Madeleine*) He always held his opinions violently. (*Crossing to Madeleine*) But I must say, old boy, you don't quite seem to be your old sunny self.

[*Blandinet appears.*]

BLANDINET (*coming down R. of chaise*): Pardon me, monsieur, but that—lady, the one with the picture—she would like a word with you when you are disengaged.

DANIEL: She's in the shop?

BLANDINET: Yes, monsieur.

DANIEL: A piece of luck! Michel, you and Julie can sign the bill of sale. (*To Blandinet*) Fix it up for

them, will you, Blandinet? The price for the picture is seven hundred thousand francs.

BLANDINET: I will attend to it, Monsieur.

[*Exit Blandinet R.*]

MICHEL (*as he follows Blandinet*): Very well, though I'm taking a chance leaving you alone with my fiancée. Have a look round, darling, and see if you can spot anything you'd like to live with—I'm sure Daniel will let you have some bargains.

[*Laughs, exits up R.*]

DANIEL (*crossing to L. of Madeleine*): So! You're going to marry that idiot? And as if he weren't enough of a fool already, you have to make a worse one of him?

MADELEINE: What do you mean?

DANIEL: This ridiculous charade—bringing him here and showing him off as if you'd won him in a raffle!

MADELEINE: I *didn't*!

DANIEL (*moving down L. slightly*): I never saw such an exhibition! When you look at him it's like a nice healthy python fascinating its lunch.

MADELEINE: I told you I was going to think of you as a father and come to you for a father's advice. You're twenty-five years older than I am—

DANIEL: I'm *not* twenty-five years older than you are, and you *know* it! I'm only twenty-four.

MADELEINE: Well, one should be able to learn quite a lot in twenty-four years.

DANIEL: When it comes to a matter of sex, you were *born* with more tricks than I could learn in a lifetime.

MADELEINE (*moving above desk*): I met Michel and became engaged to him without telling him I was your wife. I couldn't very well spring it on him.

suddenly. It might have upset everything—his being such a dear old friend of yours—

DANIEL: He's not such a dear old friend as all that. (*Moves R. of chaise.*)

MADELEINE: Anyhow I thought the best thing to do after it had gone so far was to make a joke of it—

DANIEL: Good idea! He *loves* jokes—you'll find that out! And he's as repetitious as a traffic light.

MADELEINE (*moving down to L. of chaise*): So when he comes back you can break it to him.

DANIEL: And we'll all have a good laugh together! (*Moves down R.*)

MADELEINE: And you can put in a good word for me—just to clinch it.

DANIEL (*ironically*): Oh, I will! This unique and desirable property has great charm . . . a sunny aspect . . . architecture perfect . . . graceful lines with two delightfully proportioned columns and second storey balconies of charming design.

MADELEINE (*laughing*): That's sweet of you. (*Crossing below desk to L.*)

DANIEL: And as good as new—all evidence of previous ownership carefully whitewashed over.

MADELEINE: Do you think I'll be happy with him? (*Moving up L. to above desk.*)

DANIEL: If not, you can at least be *unhappy* in comfort.

MADELEINE: What shall we tell him about *why* we are separating?

DANIEL: I suppose you would like me to take the entire blame?

MADELEINE: Well, he's already got the idea that you're quite a Casanova. That gives us *something* to start with.

DANIEL: It does, doesn't it? I'll tell him that I had one love escapade after another. (*Moves up R.*)

MADELEINE: Oh, there mustn't be too many, or he'll think I'm a woman men easily tire of.

DANIEL: You're being a bit fussy, aren't you? Perhaps if you'd be kind enough to suggest the exact number you'd prefer—

MADELEINE: I don't know why I'm worrying; I think he's very keen, don't *you*?

DANIEL: Undoubtedly.

[*They are both above desk C.*]

MADELEINE: On the way here in the taxi he did a funny thing—

DANIEL: Oh, really?

MADELEINE: I'd given him a little peck on the cheek. You know the way I have—

DANIEL: As you did with him just now—right here in front of me.

MADELEINE: Exactly—and he leant over and bit me on the shoulder. Quite hard, too. I shouldn't wonder if he'd left a mark. (*She pushes the edge of her neckline over her shoulder*) You might look, will you?

DANIEL: I see nothing.

MADELEINE: It was more at the back. (*She turns the back of her bare shoulder to him*) I hope he's not too carnivorous. You may know about that—is he?

[*Her back to him, Daniel permits himself to display his emotion.*]

DANIEL (*moving above Madeleine to chair at escritoire down L.*): Bring him in here, and we'll get this farce over with. Then you can go.

MADELEINE (*readjusting her dress*): You're so anxious to be rid of me?

DANIEL: Yes. (*His back to Madeleine.*)

MADELEINE (*moving to him down L.*): That's not a very friendly remark.

DANIEL: *We* can't be friends.

MADELEINE: Why not?

DANIEL: Because we have been lovers—you said it yourself.

MADELEINE: You've gone on being friends with Valentine.

DANIEL: Valentine was my business partner.

MADELEINE: "*Business partner*," eh? A rose on her breakfast tray *every morning*? I'm sure Monsieur Perrier pays that same charming attention to Monsieur Jouet.

DANIEL: There is such a thing as sentiment, and there is such a thing as passion.

MADELEINE (*crossing to chair L. of desk she sits*): Excuse me, Professor, will you wait a moment while I get out my notebook? I don't want to miss anything.

DANIEL (*moving to her and leaning over back of chair*): Do you remember the white roses that shone when the moonlight fell on them?

MADELEINE (*wrinkling her brow*): White roses in the moonlight?

DANIEL: That night in Deauville when we each thought the other asleep, and both reached out for a cigarette at the same moment?

MADELEINE (*vaguely*): Deauville?

DANIEL: Yes, Deauville, the place where you spent your honeymoon. (*With sudden anger*) I might have expected it! You have no more memory than a mirror! (*Moving a pace L.*)

MADELEINE: Oh yes, now I remember. The most comfortable bed I ever slept in. We called it "the cloud".

DANIEL: So, you remember the bed was comfortable. (*Crossing up to C. table.*)

MADELEINE: Well, after the thing I've been sleeping on lately—can you blame me? I wonder if they are still as good—those beds? And I wonder if they still have those beautiful little crayfish with moule sauce?

DANIEL (*crossing down to R. of desk. Swinging round*):

You wouldn't go *back* there? You *wouldn't* go there with *him*? (*Leaning over desk.*)

MADELEINE: I've always meant to go there some day and ask them for that recipe. One of my few virtues is that I'm a damned good cook . . . You might tell him *that*, by the way.

DANIEL: Once, years ago, I sat on a jury when a poor fellow was on trial for strangling his wife. I am happy to think I voted for his acquittal. (*Moves down R.*)

MADELEINE: What's the matter with you *now*?

DANIEL (*moving up R. and down again*): You don't understand? I don't understand *you*. The plane on which men and women meet is not one of intellect, but of feeling . . . But you—your feelings are as impalpable as your thoughts—

MADELEINE: What do you want to know? I'll lay my soul bare for you.

DANIEL (*sitting on stool facing Madeleine*): You told me you were stuck all that night in the Big Wheel.

MADELEINE: Yes.

DANIEL: Then you told me that was a lie.

MADELEINE: Yes.

DANIEL: You told me you had no lover.

MADELEINE: Yes.

DANIEL: Then you told me you had a lover.

MADELEINE (*correcting*): *Had* had a lover.

DANIEL: I found out your *first* story was true. The big wheel *was* stuck that night. Someone else was caught in it.

MADELEINE: Well, it's nice of you to tell me. You owe me an apology—but we'll let that go.

DANIEL: So, if your first story was true about the big wheel, it may well be that your first story was true about your lover.

MADELEINE (*with a little shrug*): What's the difference—if I'm going to marry Michel? (*Rising she crosses to R. corner*) It'll be just like you and Leda.

Michel can't kick up a rumpus because I was untrue to *you*.

DANIEL (*commandingly*): Come here! (*Rises and faces her.*)

MADELEINE: What for? I don't like men who approach you with one hand behind their backs.

[*Daniel drops the hand he is inadvertently holding behind him.*]

DANIEL: I want you to tell me something while I look in your eyes.

[*Henriette appears in doorway of living quarters hallway L.*]

HENRIETTE: Excuse me, Monsieur, but Madame wanted to know—

[*She breaks off as Madeleine turns round, facing her.*]

DANIEL: It's all right, Henriette, later— (*He moves to L. of chaise.*)

MADELEINE (*sharply*): Go on.

HENRIETTE: It—it's nothing, Madame.

MADELEINE (*advancing C. to her*): You say what you were *told* to say—the exact words!

HENRIETTE: Madame said she wishes to know if Monsieur would like to have dinner at home or whether they were going to a restaurant.

MADELEINE: "Madame" said so, did she?

[*She turns on Daniel, who sits on chaise.*]

And you think *I* have been in too much of a hurry to find someone to fill *your* shoes? (*Crossing to Daniel then moves angrily up R.*)

DANIEL: I will explain, if you will let me.

[*Henriette backs nervously off L. in archway.*]

MADELEINE: What Michel said, what Valentine said—the pieces all fit together!

[*As she speaks, Valentine appears down the stairs humming a song, coming in behind Henriette. She has changed into a house gown, and pinned over her left breast is a single red rose.*]

VALENTINE: Oh, am I interrupting, chérie?

[*Madeleine turns again, looking at her.*]

MADELEINE: A red rose—everything complete! So you also go back to old recipes— (*She goes straight towards Valentine as she speaks*) even if they are indigestible.

[*Valentine, as if expecting a personal attack, steps back, partly shielding herself. Madeleine turns in entrance, addressing Daniel.*]

I know what you were going to ask me. Well, if I didn't have one up to now, I will have after to-night!

[*She exits L.*]

[*Daniel starts after her, but Valentine, coming forward, blocks his way.*]

DANIEL (*calling after her*): Madeleine!

VALENTINE: Daniel!

DANIEL: Get out of my way!

VALENTINE (*protesting*): Daniel!

DANIEL: And get out of my house! (*Points at rose*) What did you have to wear that damned rose for?

[*He goes out, following Madeleine.*]

HENRIETTE (*re-appearing in archway L. Stupidly*): He didn't say whether he wants me to get dinner.

VALENTINE: Go and pack my trunk.

HENRIETTE: I've only just finished unpacking it.

VALENTINE (*screaming*): Go! Do as you're told, (*Moving to steps L.*)

[*Henriette turns and goes.*]

[*At the same time, re-enter Michel from shop R.*]

MICHEL (*speaking as he enters*): Adieu, Julie! Be a good girl. (*As he sees Valentine*) Hello, Valentine! Why, you don't look a year older! (*Crossing L. to her.*)

VALENTINE: Oh? How are you, Michel? (*On bottom step.*)

MICHEL: Shows Daniel must treat you pretty well—and I see that rose is still an institution. Pretty good after all these years! But then the old boy's a born lover.

VALENTINE: Yes, isn't he?

MICHEL: Where is he, by the way?

VALENTINE: Daniel has just gone out.

MICHEL (*looking around*): And where's my fiancée?

VALENTINE: Your fiancée? (*Looking around.*)

MICHEL: Yes, I left a fiancée here. Didn't you meet her?

VALENTINE: No.

MICHEL: She didn't go out *with* him, did she?

VALENTINE: No.

MICHEL: Is there anything more to this establishment?

VALENTINE (*with a gesture*): Just the living quarters.

MICHEL: Now we've got it. She's always dashing into places to look at herself in mirrors. And when you see her, you won't blame her.

VALENTINE: If you'll excuse me, Michel, I must go and pack. (*Moving R.*)

MICHEL: You and Daniel wouldn't like to dine to-night with me and the future Mrs. A, would you?

VALENTINE: Daniel and I are divorced. (*On steps of archway.*)

MICHEL: Good Lord, really? That's funny. But you're still *here*? (*He starts to do a heel and toe rock.*)

VALENTINE: I'm a partner in the business.

MICHEL: Oh, I see.

VALENTINE: Daniel is married again.

MICHEL: And *she's* here too, the new wife?

VALENTINE: She was, until just a moment ago.

MICHEL: What's her name?

VALENTINE: Madeleine.

MICHEL: Well, well, well—life is *full* of strange coincidences, isn't it?

VALENTINE: *Is* it?

MICHEL: *My* girl's name is Madeleine, too.

VALENTINE (*slowly*): Aren't you living at the Georges Cinq?

MICHEL: Yes—why?

VALENTINE: I think you must be engaged to Daniel's wife. (*Moving near him C.*)

MICHEL (*turning away*): Oh, no—don't be silly.

VALENTINE (*ticking it off on her fingers*): Look, Daniel's wife was here just now. Her name is Madeleine. You say your fiancée's name is Madeleine and you left her here—

MICHEL: Where is this second Madeleine—

VALENTINE (*still ticking it off*): Daniel's Madeleine went out. *Your* Madeleine has disappeared. There surely can't be two Madeleines appearing and disappearing. (*She moves to above desk L. of it.*)

MICHEL: But *my* Madeleine didn't even know Daniel. I just introduced them.

VALENTINE (*with a sweep of the hand round the room*): Then where is *your* Madeleine now? (*Moving down to desk chair.*)

MICHEL (*slightly irritated*): That's just what I'm asking *you*.

VALENTINE: Does she have a *last* name? Or don't you know her well enough for that?

MICHEL: Her name is De Firmont.

VALENTINE: There you are. (*Leaning on chair*) It is Daniel's Madeleine. I told you so.

MICHEL: But that's incredible! How could she?

Why *would* she? She must have known Daniel and I were old friends.

VALENTINE (*moving down a pace facing him*): Of course she did. And for that very reason she arranged to meet you—

MICHEL (*slapping his forehead*): But why? why?

VALENTINE: You, my friend, are a decoy-duck.

MICHEL: A *what*?

VALENTINE: Decoy-duck. (*She makes a motion with her hand of a duck bobbing up and down on the water.*)

MICHEL (*getting angry*): I am, am I? Well let me tell you she's not going to use me in her little games. Wait till I find her! (*He goes towards shop*) Daniel never could train his women to behave properly. (*Starts out. Turns back*) Pardon me. Nothing personal.

VALENTINE (*calling*): Michel!

MICHEL (*returning*): Yes?

VALENTINE: You invited me to dine with you to-night.

MICHEL (*taken aback*): I did? (*Moving down R. to above chaise*) Oh, you mean you and Daniel.

VALENTINE: I haven't any Daniel . . . And it looks as if you haven't any Madeleine. (*She crosses and sits on chaise.*)

MICHEL (*his indignation returning*): No; imagine her disappearing like that without so much as an *au revoir* . . . I'm her fiancé!

VALENTINE: Well, even if she's ruined your life there's no reason to let her mess up your entire evening.

MICHEL: No, I suppose not.

VALENTINE: Shall we say—eight o'clock?

MICHEL: Very well—why not? But *where*?

VALENTINE: I live at ten Rue d'Antin.

MICHEL: Black tie?

VALENTINE: Decidedly. I have a new dinner dress that'll knock the women flat.

MICHEL: Good. Well, who knows? Perhaps this was a lucky miss for me.

VALENTINE: Yes; you must be more careful in the future. You stick to the simple, honest sort of girl who hasn't any tricks up her sleeve.

MICHEL (*with a laugh*): I suppose you couldn't point one out to me?

VALENTINE: I might—if I weren't so shy. (*Claps him on shoulder.*)

MICHEL: Well, au revoir, Valentine.

VALENTINE: Au revoir.

MICHEL: Eight o'clock. (*Kisses his fingers to her*) Au revoir. Back to the *a la carte*.

[*Exit Michel.*]

[*Valentine lingers for a moment—then goes off into living quarters.*]

[*The stage is empty for a moment, during which the various antique clocks from R. and L. that are part of the stock strike at overlapping moments . . . It is six. The door through which he left opens, and Daniel re-appears. He goes over to his desk and drops into a chair. As he reaches the desk a cuckoo clock sounds six. Daniel reacts to this as another chime is heard off L. Blandinet comes in from shop.*]

BLANDINET (*surprised*): Oh, you're here, Monsieur?

[*Daniel turns slowly as if recalling himself from his reflections.*]

That gentleman who was here just went off to look for you.

DANIEL (*vaguely*): Oh?

BLANDINET: The gentleman who came with Madame.

DANIEL: He's gone, eh? Good. (*Sitting in chair L. of desk.*)

BLANDINET: It's six—would it be all right if I shut up shop?

DANIEL: Go ahead.

BLANDINET (*after a momentary hesitation*): I have a specimen here I would like to show you.

[*He takes a mounting case for a single butterfly from his pocket and hands it to Daniel with an air of pride.*]

DANIEL (*looking at it in kindly but uninterested fashion*): Beautiful. What is it?

BLANDINET: A Peacock moth—a male. They are very rare. More than a hundred females are found for every male.

DANIEL: So he has a harem?

BLANDINET: No; he mates only once.

DANIEL: Perhaps that's wise of him.

BLANDINET: The curious thing is that he has no mouth. Only the females have mouths.

DANIEL: Then how does he feed himself?

BLANDINET: He doesn't. He exists only to find the female of his dreams, to make love, and to die . . . Rather beautiful, I think.

DANIEL (*sits, elbows resting on knees, looking at the case he holds in his hands*): It's strange that with creatures so different one should feel quite a kinship.

BLANDINET: Just what I was thinking, Monsieur.

DANIEL (*with a look of surprise*): Why, Blandinet, you?

BLANDINET: Yes, Monsieur (*Picks up specimen case. As he turns—*

The Curtain falls

—to denote the passing of two days.)

ACT III

The picture is placed on floor at the L. side of table up C. Bust of Voltaire and cheque are struck—when ready the Curtain rises immediately.

The stage is empty at rise.

Julie enters from shop. There is a visible improvement in her appearance. She calls back over her shoulder to Blandinet.

JULIE: He's not here.

[*Blandinet appears in doorway.*]

BLANDINET (*moving near Arch L.*): Then he must have gone upstairs for something. He'd have told me if he was going out.

JULIE: How is he?

BLANDINET: Quite well, I think.

JULIE: Well in his mind?

BLANDINET: How do we know what goes on in each other's minds?

JULIE (*sitting on chaise*): Nonsense. What are we given tongues and ears for?

BLANDINET: I can't ask Monsieur Bachelet if he is feeling happy. He doesn't ask *me*. We are not on such terms.

JULIE: *Are* you happy?

BLANDINET: No.

JULIE: Why not? Because you are poor and can't have all the things you want?

BLANDINET: I don't mind being poor. But you are right—it is because I cannot have the thing I want.

JULIE: Hm! Sounds like love.

BLANDINET (*simply*): Yes, it is love, Madame.

JULIE (*eyeing him*): Of course. It *would* be—at your age.

BLANDINET: Love is essential to Nature. For most creatures to love is to die, but for *all* creatures *not* to love is not to have lived.

JULIE: You're a strange boy.

BLANDINET: I am not a boy, Madame. I am a man. I am twenty-two years old.

JULIE (*with her characteristic sniff*): And I mustn't call you a boy? I've known plenty that liked me to call 'em boys that'd get winded playing a game of picquet.

BLANDINET: Would you like to see your picture again, Madame? It has not yet left here.

JULIE: Yes. Where is it?

BLANDINET: Here.

[*He goes and takes the picture from table up C. and brings it, displaying it to Julie. He sits on stool with picture facing Julie.*]

JULIE: One more look . . . This is the last, I expect.

BLANDINET: You have not lived in vain, Madame.

JULIE: Flattery. A childless woman. I have dropped the torch which has been passed hand to hand, since the beginning of time. (*She stares at the picture as she says it.*)

BLANDINET: The woman still lives who posed for the Sistine Madonna . . . And what of the Mona Lisa? The Medici Venus? To have left beauty to the world is to have left *everything*.

JULIE: I was no beauty.

BLANDINET: You can't say that. Not when we look through the eyes of Toulouse-Lautrec.

[*From the living quarters entrance, Daniel appears. He carries a handsome case of the type in which women carry their perfumes. He wears an informal house coat. He puts case on desk and moves down L.*]

DANIEL: Oh, Julie, how are you? So you've come to say goodbye to your richly married daughter.

JULIE (*rises, crosses to him L. below desk*): I'd no idea it was still here. I just dropped in to see you.

[*Blandinet places picture on armchair down R. The painting faces upstage—after which he exits R.*]

DANIEL (*putting case down on his desk*): You're looking smart.

JULIE: I've been buying a few things. I went to a beauty parlour just to find out what they *did* to you now. I'm never going through all that again.

DANIEL: Don't say that. Keep the old flag flying, Julie.

JULIE (*moving a pace to R.*): I do *that*—don't worry. I sail down the street like a battleship going into action. I'm free! I'm my own mistress—and you must admit *that* makes a nice change for me!

[*They both laugh. Daniel moves to L. of desk.*]

Tell me, how are things with you? (*Sits on bench R. of desk.*)

DANIEL: Business has never been better. (*Standing at back of chair.*)

JULIE: I'm not asking about business.

DANIEL: Well—I've found out the truth of the saying that it's better to choose a girl you can live *with*, than the girl you can't live without.

JULIE: My poor Jo-jo.

DANIEL (*opening the case*): Do you know what *this* is? Her case of perfumes. It's the only thing left here that belonged to her. She is sending for it to-day. (*As he speaks he takes a bottle from the case and smells it, then scents his handkerchief.*)

JULIE: Was that one her favourite?

DANIEL: It was *my* favourite.

JULIE: That must have meant the same thing.

[*He holds the handkerchief loosely crumpled in one hand and brushes it against his face—he leaves handkerchief on desk.*]

DANIEL (*eyes shut*): Strange how the perfume can evoke the woman . . . If you could only preserve that personal scent of her that has nothing to do with the stuff that comes in bottles.

JULIE: Have you still no idea what's happened to her?

DANIEL: Oh, she turned up here a couple of days ago with our old friend Jigs.

JULIE: *What?*

DANIEL: It was the afternoon you talked with him, when we sold him the picture.

JULIE: He told me he was going to get married.

DANIEL: That's right. *That's* whom he's marrying. (*He sits at desk.*)

JULIE: *Your wife?*

DANIEL: *My wife.*

JULIE: And she brought him here?

DANIEL: Yes. (*Turns away.*)

JULIE: Then you *haven't* lost her.

DANIEL: Why do you say that? (*Facing Julie.*)

JULIE: What d'you suppose she brought him here *for*? How much do you know about women?

DANIEL: Nothing.

JULIE: Did you show her you were jealous?

DANIEL: No.

JULIE: That's what she was hoping for.

DANIEL: The afternoon she was here a most unfortunate thing happened. Valentine, my first wife, had moved in and installed herself.

JULIE: Good Lord! Don't tell me they met?

DANIEL: Banged right into each other, Valentine in a housegown, wearing a flower I had presumably given her.

JULIE: I don't wonder your number two was upset.

DANIEL: She rushed out of here saying that if she hadn't had a lover before she was certainly going to find one that night.

JULIE: And that was two nights ago?

DANIEL: *Two* nights—exceptionally long nights, it seems to me.

JULIE: Is that the last you've heard of her?

DANIEL: No; she sent round for the rest of her belongings. All except this. (*He touches the perfume case*) It was forgotten.

JULIE: And you've done nothing?

[*He shakes his head.*]

Just sat here on your tail, brooding?

DANIEL (*rises and moves above desk to R. of Julie*): Well, if she has a lover, if she doesn't want me any more, or if she really wants to marry Michel—

JULIE (*impatiently*): If—if—if—

DANIEL: Yes, if, if, if, if—it's *she* who throws them at me, like banderillos in a bullfight, until I'm filled with these sharp-pricking, torturing doubts. Never a straight answer, never a "yes" or a "no". Or else it's "yes" and "no" to the same question. (*He sits on chaise facing Julie.*)

JULIE: She's using the will o' the wisp formula, or, as it's sometimes called the "Fata Morgana".

DANIEL: Formula?

JULIE: Yes, one of the formulas for treating men.

DANIEL (*incredulously*): Women have formulas?

JULIE: Of course—a whole series. For instance, the "ice-box" formula. That's when she's cold, won't speak to you, won't even answer questions.

DANIEL: I've met that one.

JULIE: Naturally. It's one of the most popular. Then there's the Mona Lisa formula, the mocking smile, the cynical remarks—"Love is just a bowl of cherries."

DANIEL: Yes, go on.

JULIE: Oh, there are a lot, the "Camille" . . . it isn't necessarily tubercular, but you look wan and lie about on sofas and tell him you hope he'll be happy after you're dead, but please don't do all the

things with the other girls that he did with you.
DANIEL (*profoundly shocked*): These are actual formulas?

JULIE: They're numbered. Of course I've no right to be telling you trade secrets—only I'm out of business.

DANIEL: So love is a business?

JULIE: Yes—woman's business. And a damned good one it is, if she keeps up the quality of the stock.

DANIEL: If you'd only tipped me off about these formulas years ago—

JULIE (*rises*): What, when I was working them on you? No fear!

[*Henriette crosses hallway and opens door.*]

But cheer up, Jo-jo, where there's a formula there's an interest. There's still hope. (*She crosses and sits on chaise above Daniel.*)

PORTER (*off L.*): Hello, bébé!

HENRIETTE (*off L.*): Oh, it's you.

PORTER: Afternoon, Monsieur! (*Entering from Hall L.*)

DANIEL: Ah, at last! (*He rises and moves C. above desk.*)

[*Henriette exits to kitchen across hall.*]

PORTER (*moving to L. of desk*): Sorry about the delay. Got your order all right, but there's been a rush on. Summer holidays—everybody dashing off to the country.

DANIEL: Of course.

PORTER: Pardon, Monsieur, but I don't know why you say "of course". Far as I'm concerned, when you've seen one cow you've seen them all. (*He stares at Julie.*)

JULIE: Don't look at *me* when you say that.

PORTER: Oh, Madame, you wrong me. (*He bows to her.*)

DANIEL: Listen carefully, will you, please? I want you to take that trunk you brought here back to where it came from—Madame Valentine Bachelet.

PORTER: Ten, Rue d'Antin. (*Writing address in note book.*)

DANIEL: That's right; then I want you to take this case to 28 Rue Cassot.

PORTER (*writing on pad*): Aha! Where you *thought* the trunk came from? What's this one's name?

DANNIEL: Madame Daniel Bachelet.

PORTER: A bit complex, eh?

JULIE: *Very* complex.

PORTER: *I* had a friend once who had two wives. Said it kept things from getting monotonous.

JULIE: It certainly does that.

PORTER: They were both named Marie. He *had* to fix it like that 'cause he had a way of talking in his sleep.

DANIEL: Be very careful with this case. It's full of glass bottles. (*He hands case to Porter.*)

PORTER (*wetting his pencil point*): Looks like it might be a case of poisons.

DANIEL: Your mind seems to run in that direction.

PORTER: It makes my job more interesting.

[*Porter exits L.*]

JULIE: Isn't Jigs ever coming round for his picture? (*She waves her hand at the Lautrec.*)

DANIEL (*moving up C.*): I might have this fellow drop it round at the Georges Cinq.

JULIE: Yes, I don't suppose you're very anxious to see our friend again.

DANIEL: No. (*Calling off L.*) Oh, Porter?

[*Porter re-appears with trunk, Henriette enters behind him. Daniel turns to him.*]

There's another thing, a painting— (*He indicates it with a wave of the hand.*)

PORTER (*putting trunk down in Archway*): Don't think I'd better take it on this trip, Monsieur. Things are complex enough. (*He comes down and looks at the Lautrec*) Well, well, well! It's this lady here, isn't it?

JULIE (*pleased*): You can still recognise it?

PORTER: Yes—yes, indeed! (*Gives a quick glance at her, then back to picture*) Well, well! Makes you realise what life is, though, doesn't it?

JULIE: It sure does.

PORTER (*turning to the trunk*): I'll be back . . . Must make a special trip of that. Wants very careful handling. (*Picks up trunk, shoulders it*) You'd better bring out that case, Henriette.

[*He goes off, Henriette obediently picks up case and follows him out through street door.*]

(*As he goes*) What do you do with your evenings?

HENRIETTE: That's no business of yours.

[*She follows Porter off.*]

JULIE: I'd better be running along.

DANIEL: Wait a few minutes while I change my coat. I've got to go over to my warehouse, and I'll drop you—it's out your way.

JULIE: Sure. Always glad to save a bit of shoe-leather.

DANIEL: I won't be long.

[*He exits up staircase.*]

[*Julie takes cigar from handbag, rises, moves to desk looking for match. A moment afterwards Henriette returns, and closes outside door. As she turns to go into living quarters she sniffs.*]

JULIE: Girl! Can you find me a match?

HENRIETTE: Yes, Madame. (*She crosses to escritoire for matches. Returns to Julie—sniffing as she lights her cigar.*)

JULIE: What are you sniffing for?

HENRIETTE: It's nothing, Madame.

JULIE: Then why are you crying?

HENRIETTE: It—it's seeing that bag go. It is so dull without any Madame in the house.

JULIE: Not a keyhole worth listening at?

HENRIETTE: But you see, Madame, I learned so much about men that way. How to get them interested, and still keep them in their place.

JULIE (*she sits on chaise R.*): H'm! Not so easy at your age to keep both your head and your man.

[*As she speaks there is the sound of voices off in shop.*]

[*Henriette exits to kitchen.*]

[*Madeleine is heard saying, off R.*]

MADELEINE (*off R.*): Is Monsieur here?

BLANDINET (*off R.*): I believe so, Madame.

[*Madeleine appears, with Blandinet following. She is, as always, charmingly dressed.*]

MADELEINE (*pausing as she sees Julie. Crossing L. above desk*): Oh, pardon me!

JULIE: Daniel is upstairs changing his coat.

MADELEINE: I just came to pick up a case of mine. (*She makes a turn as if to go in search of Henriette.*)

JULIE: Your case just left here—all but that one bottle. (*She points to bottle on Daniel's desk.*)

MADELEINE: Oh, thank you—then it's all right. (*She turns, starting back to shop.*)

JULIE: Wait a minute.

[*Madeleine stops, turns.*]

I want to have a look at you. (*Impatiently, to Blandinet*) Run along, boy. Don't stand there gaping.

[*Blandinet turns in doorway and goes back into shop.*]

[*Madeleine moves a step or two nearer Julie.*]

I just want to see what the girl looks like that can do what you've done to a man like Daniel.

MADELEINE (*opening her eyes a trifle widely*): What I've done to him?

JULIE: Don't talk to me as if I were a man, even if I do smoke cigars. I know you can play more tricks with one of them than a monkey can with a cocoanut.

MADELEINE: Is Daniel here alone?

JULIE: Yes, he's living here alone. You telephoned the maid about your perfume, didn't you?

MADELEINE: Yes.

JULIE: Then I'm sure you didn't forget to ask her if Valentine was still here.

MADELEINE: You know all about Daniel's affairs, I see.

JULIE: Daniel has only *one* affair—the grand affair of his life. And knowing him, there must be more to justify it than your very pretty face, and your lovely figure . . . You must have a brain, and you must have a heart.

MADELEINE: Thank you for thinking me pretty, but— (*Moving L. near desk chair.*)

JULIE (*overlapping*): Why do you suppose that bottle of perfume was left behind? It is the one you generally use, I believe?

MADELEINE: Yes. (*She stands L. of desk.*)

JULIE: Daniel scented his handkerchief and closed his eyes to have you there for just a moment.

[*Madeleine is silent.*]

You will agree, Madame, that when a person is very rich, it is detestable of them to take advantage of someone poorer . . . *You* have the wealth of the Indies.

MADELEINE (*astonished*): I?

JULIE: Youth. It is a case of noblesse oblige, Madame.

MADELEINE (*going over and picking up the perfume bottle*): Does he really love me so much?

JULIE: Yes. And if you've been sleeping with another man, you might have the decency to make your lies convincing.

MADELEINE (*moving above desk to R. of C.*): But I *haven't*. I never have. I was upset about a letter. And there were other things—a cheque to his ex-wife when I couldn't have a new dress.

JULIE (*eyeing her keenly*): There was no one?

MADELEINE: A tiny love-affair—that big. (*She holds thumb and finger an inch apart*) A boy. I kissed him. It was in the Big Wheel.

JULIE: *Where?*

MADELEINE: Have you ever been along with a man in one of those little cars on a Big Wheel? (*Moves down, sits in chair L. of desk.*)

JULIE: Not that I remember.

MADELEINE: It's wonderful! Your friend is very discreet as he puts his arm around you—so that you will feel safe. And then the car starts to mount, you leave the earth, people who watch you . . . Your lips meet, and you go on, up, up, until, at the top, only the angels can see you—then down to earth again, to people, to prying eyes—then up, up, once again . . .

JULIE (*drily*): Too bad I didn't know about this sooner.

MADELEINE: And then suddenly the thing stopped, something had jammed, a broken cogwheel they said . . . We were stuck there all night.

JULIE: And did the kissing continue?

MADELEINE: No—when the wheel stopped, *that* stopped. I'd become quite cold—my feet especially. Somehow, when your *feet* are cold—

JULIE (*with a touch of impatience*): I know.

MADELEINE: Also I started thinking about Daniel in that nice, warm bed. Only he *wasn't* in it, it seems, he was out looking for me.

JULIE: You told him all this?

MADELEINE (*with a half shrug*): He didn't believe me.

JULIE: That's the trouble. They have a way of not believing us when we are telling the truth, and then believing us when we get mad and say we can get along just as well without 'em. By the way, what about Jigs?

MADELEINE: Jigs?

JULIE: Michel.

MADELEINE: Oh, nothing would ever have come of that.

JULIE: Well, if he hasn't you, at least he's got *me*. (*She nods her head at the Lautrec*) And he won't have to worry about *her* staying out all night. (*Rises*) Will you tell Daniel I couldn't wait?

MADELEINE: Must you go?

JULIE (*loaded with her paraphernalia, she moves towards shop*): I'll be seeing you again some day, if prosperity doesn't kill me.

[*Julie puts her parasol over her shoulder, gunwise, and marches off R.*]

[*Madeleine looks after her a moment, then goes back to Daniel's desk and picks up the handkerchief that he left there. Blandinet enters from shop as Madeleine moves down to below L. of desk.*]

BLANDINET: Madeleine—

MADELEINE (*turning*): Yes, Pierre?

BLANDINET: Are you going to marry that millionaire? (*Crosses below desk facing Madeleine.*)

MADELEINE: No, Pierre.

BLANDINET (*taking an eager step forward*): Then will you marry me?

MADELEINE: No, Pierre. I'm sorry.

BLANDINET: Are you afraid of being poor? You needn't be. It's not bad, *really*. You see everything becomes an adventure. A new hat for your sweet-

heart is an achievement—something you have *worked* for.

MADELEINE: Yes, I know, Pierre, it would be *fun*—

BLANDINET: Yes, *fun*, that's it. *You* see it too! The dreams, the plans, the obstacles that must be surmounted . . . The rich don't have any of that . . . There can be no castles-in-the-air for people who *live* in castles.

MADELEINE: You should be a poet, Pierre.

BLANDINET (*shaking his head a trifle sadly*): No; I have no talent. I know a little about old furniture—and a little about spiders. (*He gives a laugh*) And I have only one room, Madeleine, and it is up a lot of stairs, but I will tell you something: (*Confidentially*) When you blow out the candle beside your bed and the dark closes about you, you can make believe you are in a room in Versailles with silk hangings and cupids dancing on the ceiling.

MADELEINE: I've been very bad, Pierre.

BLANDINET (*pointing up*): To *him*?

MADELEINE: To *you*.

BLANDINET: Because you let me kiss you?

MADELEINE: Yes.

BLANDINET: Nothing that is very beautiful can be very bad. Do you remember when the Wheel was going up, up—you and I together, like the queen bee and her lover on the nuptial flight?

MADELEINE: I hope soon there will be a girl who will love to be with you in your palace bedroom.

BLANDINET (*pause*): I see. May I kiss you once more—just for good bye?

MADELEINE: Yes.

[*He puts his arms about her rather awkwardly—they kiss.*]

BLANDINET: Madeleine—Madeleine! Such a beautiful name, like a lily floating on a pool— (*As he releases her*) And I shall never call you so again.

MADELEINE: You *will* let me be your friend, won't you, Pierre? ,

[*He exits.*]

[*Madeleine looks after Blandinet and takes her hat off—puts it on stool R. of desk. (Cue light for Daniel.) A moment later Daniel enters downstairs dressed in street attire. He sees Madeleine—holds out his arms—but when she turns adopts a stern attitude towards her. Coming down L.*]

DANIEL: Madeleine!

MADELEINE (*turning*): I've come back to you, Daniel.

DANIEL: What makes you think I want you?

MADELEINE: You may not have to have me very long. (*She coughs and crosses to chaise.*)

DANIEL: What do you mean?

MADELEINE (*sitting on chaise. In a rather small voice*): I've not been sleeping. Of course, how *could* I, on those broken springs? But it's *more* than that. I don't feel well. You used to take such wonderful care of me when I was ill, *baby* me—I don't know whether you want to any more.

DANIEL (*sitting beside her on chaise*): Are you really as ill as all that?

MADELEINE (*with a sigh*): I'm afraid so, and if things come to the worst, I hope you'll find yourself a *better* wife—someone who won't plague and torture you. But please, promise me if you do—(*She coughs again.*)

DANIEL (*rising*): My God, the Camille formula!

MADELEINE: What in the world do you mean?

DANIEL: All alike—trollops, every one of you!

[*He starts to put his arms around her, but she fends him off and turns to the audience.*]

MADELEINE (*rising and moving L. she speaks to audience*): Oh, did you hear what he said?

DANIEL (R.): Ssh! You mustn't speak to the audience.

MADELEINE: *You* were doing it the other day. Henriette told me so.

DANIEL: That's no reason why you should do it too.

MADELEINE: I only want to tell you—

DANIEL: No! If you start talking to the audience, I shall ask them to drop the curtains.

MADELEINE: All the same, I want to explain—

DANIEL: Be quiet!

MADELEINE: But *why*? *You* did it!

DANIEL: That's different. I was telling them the truth. But you . . . No, you can lie to me, but not to them.

MADELEINE (*breaking away L.*): But . . . Listen, ladies, men are different, but husbands are all alike.

[*She is trying to release herself from his hand, which is gripping hers, and struggling to get down to the footlights.*]

DANIEL (*firmly, placing his hand over her mouth*): No. Not a word. (*Motions off.*) Curtain! (*To audience*) Don't listen, men!

[*Curtain.*]

